

London School of Economics and Political Science

Beyond the Muslim Prisoner

Understanding religious identification amongst Muslim offenders

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Abstract

Muslim religious identity amongst offenders has acquired significance as Islam is the fastest growing religion in prisons in the UK. This increase in the number of Muslim offenders in prison is accompanied by fears and concern about the potential for Islamist terrorist recruitment and radicalisation in the prison setting. Despite these concerns, there are significant gaps in our understanding of how religion influences the identity of offenders throughout their life. My research uses life story interviews with Muslim offenders (N=17) to provide a holistic overview of the significance of religion at different stages over the life course. The sample includes both converts and born-Muslims to provide insight into the influence of religion on the identity of both groups.

The thesis starts by bringing together insights from sociological and anthropological literature on religion, along with theoretical criminological perspectives on identity in prison as well as post-release. It then discusses the methodological underpinnings of this research. In the first empirical chapter I discuss the importance of religion in childhood; the next chapter examines shifts in religious identity during adolescence and early adulthood. After discussing the significance of religion in the prison environment, I conclude by looking at whether changes to identity that occur in prison are sustained upon release.

This research provides an original contribution to knowledge by looking at the processual development of religious identity over the life course. It identifies three main ways in which religion is important in the lives of the participants over the life course. (i) Religion is regarded as important in developing and maintaining a connection to a fictive local kinship group based on shared attendance at a place of worship (ii) Spiritual sense-making is useful for dealing with times of emotional distress and material deprivation. This sense-making allows participants to feel a sense of wellbeing and personal meaning even when they are experiencing difficulties and setbacks (iii) Religion provides a moral understanding through which participants develop ideational social roles in their family, work place and in their community. Through these social roles participants can develop holistic ideals of self-fulfilment and non-material personal goals. Although religion can play an important role in identity development, its influence rises and falls over the life course. Factors such as gender, class, age, local neighbourhood, personal biography and ethnicity remain more consistent influences on identity.

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List of Acronyms

CJS Criminal Justice System

CPS Crown Prosecution Service

HMIP Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons

NOMS National Offender Management Service

YOI Young Offenders' Institutes

TACT Terrorism Act 2000

RO Resettlement organisation

LPT London Probation Trust

PO Probation officers

CRC Community Rehabilitation Company

NPS National Probation Service

HMG Her Majesty's Government

1: Introduction

Muslim prisoners have been at the centre of media and policy attention for the last decade. This period has seen a 49% increase in the Muslim prisoner population¹ which increased from 8,864 (in 2007) to 13,185 (in 2017) (Lammy, 2017). Muslims make up 5% of the general population but make up 15% of the prison population. In maximum security prisons and Young Offender's Institutions (YOIs) one in five offenders is Muslim (Lammy, 2017). This exponential increase in the numbers of Muslims in prison over the last decade has raised concern about the factors fuelling this rise².

In part the increase of Muslims in prison is seen as linked to the higher proportion of young males within ethnic groups that tend to be Muslim. Along with this, underachievement in education of Muslim boys, is linked to Muslim boys' propensity to adopt 'laddish' and 'gangsta' identities which involves an indifference to educational achievement and a resistance to British national identity which is seen as feminine, white and un-Islamic (Archer, 2001). Attention has also been drawn to a Manichean division in which Muslims are seen to be self-segregating and setting themselves apart as a religious community, which is separate to and in conflict with broader British society. This setting apart means that English law and the criminal justice system are seen as inherently un-Islamic and do not need to be respected.

The increase in Muslims in prison is also seen to be related to conversion to Islam inside prison; media reports focus on the 'perks' of being Muslim in prison. This was followed by news stories drawing attention to Muslim 'gangs' taking over 'control' in UK prisons. In 2015 a BBC panorama programme, 'From Jail to Jihad?'³, focused specifically on the challenge posed by Islamist extremists recruiting vulnerable prisoners for violent Jihad in UK

¹ Table 1A.10 Prison population by religion and sex in Annual Prison Population: 2017
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/offender-management-statistics-quarterly-january-to-march-2017>

² 'One in five young prisoners are Muslim, report reveals' *Guardian* 2012.

'Lags Go Muslim for Better Food' *The Sun* 2010

'Lags' fury at Muslim fast food' *The Daily Star* 2012

'Growing fears over Muslim prison 'gangs'' *BBC News* 2010

'Prisoners Convert to Islam to Win Perks and get protection from powerful Muslim gangs' *Daily Mail Online* 2010

'Prisons Within Prisons' Are Being Set Up To Separate Muslim Extremists From Other Inmates' *Huffington Post* 2016.

³ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-27357208>

prisons. This concern was also echoed in government policy where PREVENT⁴, the government's flagship programme to counter Islamist extremism, identified prisons as one of the key institutions where radicalisation can occur. Academic research on Muslims in prison also focused on the 'conveyor belt' to terrorism represented by imprisonment (Bouhana & Wikström, 2011; Hannah, Clutterbuck, & Rubin, 2008).

Terrorist attacks in which the perpetrators had served previous prison sentences further confirmed the fear that conversion to Islam in prison could be a first step towards radicalisation and extremism. Richard Reid, known as the 'shoe bomber', the murderers of Lee Rigby, and the recent attacker on Westminster Bridge in London had all served prison sentences and were converts to Islam. While not much is known of their personal journey towards perpetrating these crimes, it raised questions about the significance of Islam for prisoners in UK prisons.

Of the Muslim prison population, only 175 (0.01%) are Muslims convicted of terrorist offences (Lammy, 2017). However, the threat this group poses is amplified by the concern that they can continue to recruit others towards their cause. Recently the government announced plans to separate Muslim extremist prisoners in special segregated units within the maximum-security prison estate⁵. This announcement represents a change in policy in which the dispersal model, in which these prisoners were distributed across the prison estate, which had prevailed up to now is being replaced by separating suspected violent extremist prisoners from the general prison population. This is to limit their attempts at spreading their message to other prisoners.

Along with these concerns around radicalisation, recent inspectorate reports of prisons in England and Wales suggest that Muslim prisoners are the most alienated group inside prisons (HMIP, 2010). A key grievance of Muslim prisoners was that they felt they were treated as a homogenous group and through the lens of extremism and terrorism (HMIP 2010). A focus on religion as a 'risk' is seen to lead to feelings of alienation and unequal treatment, where Black and Muslim prisoners reported reduced access to opportunities and interventions that

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-strategy-2011>

support rehabilitation as well as less positive relationships with staff (Lammy, 2017). Clearly the recent increase in the number of Muslim prisoners in the prison estate poses unique and new challenges for policy and research.

The significance of religion in political and social spheres outside the criminal justice system has also gained attention since the attacks on the World Trade Centre in September 2011. 9/11 represented a watershed moment, the first in what has become a depressingly regular occurrence, of violent and deadly attacks perpetrated in the name of Islam in different locations across the globe. These religiously inspired attacks within the global order continually remind us of the continuing significance of religion as a tool for political mobilisation. This draws attention to the role of religion as form a collective identity in which members can develop collective goals and can mobilise to influence state policy. This collective mobilisation, particularly when it adopts violent means poses distinct challenges within multicultural, religiously plural nation states.

The first political mobilisation by Muslims in the UK was to seek to ban the publication of *The Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie in the 1980s, since then similar controversies have continued to emerge within the public domain (McRoy, 2006). A key concern for secular societies has been the perceived incompatibility between religious sentiment and secular values. An example of this is the outrage and demands for censorship by Muslim communities on the publication of the Danish cartoon in which Prophet Muhammad was portrayed as a terrorist. This has raised concerns in public debate and the media about how the religious demands of a group could infringe on and change the freedoms enjoyed within a secular society- such as freedom of expression and speech (Field, 2007).

Within academic debate Huntington (1996) also suggests such a clash between Western civilisation and Islam arguing that the two are incompatible and always in conflict. Huntington (1993; 1996) proposes that, civilizational fault lines based on cultural differences have become the central conflict in the post-cold war order. He argues that a ‘velvet curtain’ has replaced the ‘iron curtain’, whereby people have come together and started to build alliances on the basis of a similar religion, heritage, or culture. For Huntington, these civilisations are based on a shared language, history, religion, customs or institutions along with a self-identification on the part of individuals to such a group. The main clash or divide exists between Western civilisation which is based on a shared common heritage in the

Enlightenment period and Islam which, has always been in opposition to this civilisation. Huntington gives examples of the Crusades and the Ottoman expansion into Europe as earlier examples of this clash of incompatible civilisations. Within modern nation states these civilizational alliances and identities can supersede national identity; therefore, this conflict presents itself within nation states where individuals who affiliate themselves with groups separated by civilizational fault lines interact and contest amongst themselves to establish their values and way of life over the 'other'. These clashes can also present through a clash over resources, rights and other policy issues making these civilisation differences central to policy concerns and debates.

Similar to Huntington's proposition, public debate has raised concerns that Muslim communities were at odds with Western society on a number of key issues ranging from foreign policy, to attitudes towards women, and sexual rights and freedoms (Bawer, 2006; Caldwell, 2009). Concerns regarding social cohesion and integration of Muslim communities emerged and took centre stage leading to shifts in policy which saw a move away from multiculturalism (which advocates the celebration of cultural and ethnic diversity) towards policies that focused on assimilation based on shared identity and interests (Vasta, 2003). Ye'or (2005) for example suggests that the policies of multiculturalism and multilateralism adopted by European countries have led to the Islamisation of Europe. She argues that Europe needs to defend itself from the influence of Islamisation by reaffirming its own values based on Enlightenment principles. Ye'or (2011) like Huntington argues that Western principles are at odds with and incompatible with Islamist thoughts and ideals.

Research has also looked at the crafting of Muslims as a feared and demonised 'other' that is in conflict with and in opposition to Western civilisation (Goldberg, 2009). Terms like 'Islamophobia' try to capture the fear of Islam that has been generated because of the negative images and impressions of Muslims within public debate and the media (Meer and Modood, 2009). The intersection of race, ethnicity, and religion with masculinity has received sustained focus in accounts that link Muslim men to crime (Britton, 2018). Whether it is terrorist attacks, or sexual offences, offenders are identified and held accountable as Muslims, both by non-Muslims and other Muslims. Thus, Muslim men as a category have dominated public and media attention as a separate unassimilable group, with a particular set of cultural signifiers, which are dangerous and pose a threat to mainstream British society (Britton, 2015, 2018).

These concerns, some emerging and some established, provide a unique context for this research on religious identity amongst Muslims offenders. Drawing on these wider public debates and concerns, I move beyond the focus on Muslim prisoners to look at the significance of religious identity over the life course of male offenders who self-identify as Muslim, this includes born-Muslims as well as converts to Islam. This focus is important as although Islam in prison has captured attention, research has not focused on pre-prison or post-prison experiences of Muslim offenders. My study extends the field, and fills this gap in criminological literature, which to date has focused exclusively on the Muslim prisoner. It offers a detailed study of the practise and meaning of Islam in the lives of offenders throughout their life, including: prior to conviction; whilst in prison; and during their re-entry phase once they have been released from prison.

My research is the first oral life story qualitative study of the identity of Muslim offenders (N=17) and the sample includes both converts and born-Muslims to provide insight into the influence of religion on the identity of both groups. It provides an original contribution to knowledge by looking at the processual development of religious identity over the life course. This processual approach is important in explaining the shifting and changing influence of religion at different age stages and in varying contexts. This focus on Muslim offenders brings together concerns surrounding the appeal of Islam as an oppositional identity within a group that has already set itself apart by breaking societal laws, as well as allowing for insight into the role of religion in the lives of born-Muslims who have gone on to become involved in crime. Such a focus also allows for a discussion of any cultural or ethnic values, linked to religion, that may lead to an increase in offending behaviour. I also discuss the commonality of experience between my research participants, who belong to the sub-group-Muslim offenders and well-established literature on youth offending, crime, identity in prison and post release. Along with this my research highlights the unique aspects of this group of Muslim offenders by discussing their diverse histories as well as the current realities of harm, privilege and inequality for this sub group. It is also original as it brings together insights from sociological and anthropological literature on religion, literature on identity in late modernity, along with theoretical criminological perspectives on pathways towards crime, identity in prison as well as post-release.

Through the focus on religion I identify three main ways in which religion is important in the lives of the participants over the life course. (i) Religion is regarded as important in developing and maintaining a connection to a fictive local kinship group based on shared attendance at a place of worship. Such connections can be particularly important in unfamiliar social surroundings, or periods of personal crisis or change. (ii) Religion provides a frame of reference through which adherents make sense of life events, predict future events and act. This spiritual sense-making is particularly useful for dealing with times of emotional distress and material deprivation as it allows participants to feel a sense of wellbeing and personal meaning even when they are experiencing difficulties and setbacks (iii) Religion provides a moral understanding through which participants develop ideational social roles in their family, work place and in their community. Through these social roles participants can develop holistic ideals of self-fulfilment and non-material personal goals.

My research discusses the complex ways in which British Muslims construct their identity, it adds to debates on Muslim masculinities, Muslim youth, as well as Muslim prisoners and offenders. Identity, community and cohesion are contested and important research themes in sociology. I move away from singular narratives around these themes, to develop a more multifaceted way to capture the complexity of how people view themselves, and how they construct ideas of community and solidarity in everyday experiences. Theoretically this research is important as it adds knowledge to debates around the relationship of Islam to identity and citizenship in Western liberal democracies. It also contributes to empirical knowledge about the shifts in identity between first generation and later (second and third) generation migrants and the impact of these changes on trust and belonging in wider society as well as on generational and family relationships. I suggest that although religion can play an important role in identity development, its influence rises and falls over the life course. Factors such as gender, race, class, age, local neighbourhood, personal biography and ethnicity remain more consistent influences on identity. The intermixing of these factors in influencing self-identity, draws attention to complex processes of identity development and contributes to debates around hybridity, new ethnicities, mixed identities and British multiculturalism. My research outlines the influence of religion in everyday life as well as highlighting changes and shifts in religious practise and beliefs based on the social context of the individual. It is significant as it challenges the assumption that religion is the sole signifier of identity for British Muslims.

1.1 Overview of thesis

In Chapter two, I start by discussing the theoretical literature used to frame the research. The research context required drawing on theoretical insights from literature on religious identity formation, along with looking at changes wrought to identity due to imprisonment. These bodies of literature that cut across sociology, anthropology and criminology provide a theoretical framework for the empirical analysis. Chapter three outlines the methodological underpinnings of this research. I start by outlining the oral life story approach adopted for this research. I then move on to discuss the challenges associated with my preferred approach as well as the difficulties of accessing participants and conducting multiple qualitative interviews with a hard to reach group. I discuss reflexive reflections on data collection and the ethical challenges I faced.

Chapter 4 to 7 discuss the empirical findings emerging from this research. Chapter four and five discuss religious affiliation prior to incarceration. Life before prison is broken down into two age phases, childhood and adolescence. Chapter 4 outlines data on identity in childhood. Participants memories of religious participation in childhood describe religious practise to be located within communities with a common descent group and kinship ties. Religious education involved cultural knowledge exchange as well as a focus on developing social bonds within the community. This sense of belonging to a community was however ephemeral, as participants grew older they described becoming distant from kinship communities and attached more importance to peer relationships in their neighbourhoods and in school. Early childhood religious experiences also focused on transcendental sense making and spiritualism as being an important aspects of childhood religious experience. This spiritual sense making was an enduring influence on identity as participants looked for spiritual significance in childhood events and linked these events to their current lives and decisions. Significantly for this research more than religion, childhood memories focused on precarity linked to socio-economic disadvantage and experiences of racism and social exclusion in schools, kinship communities as well as in the neighbourhood. The longer-term importance of these childhood experiences was emphasised by participants who saw these as playing a formative role in the trajectories of their life and opportunities they felt they had

available to them. Chapter 6 discusses changes to identity in adolescence. It focuses on an age stage regarded as the 'peak' age for offending. This chapter discusses the ways in which religious practise is deemphasised by participants during this age stage. Religion is seen to be a latent part of identity, in that participants still see themselves as Muslim but did not feel that religion was a significant influence in their lives. Relational aspects of faith remained important as participants still retained a connection with their kinship community however this belonging is negotiated and becomes more peripheral to other more important social ties that are formed with peers. Participants draw on classical techniques of neutralisation to reconcile their religious beliefs with involvement in crime. Accounts of adolescence focused on reasons for involvement in crime, which was linked to lack of opportunity to establish a career, continued precarity linked to socio-economic disadvantage, thrill seeking, the draws of accessing material goods and the importance of hypermasculinity in establishing an adult male identity for working-class men from an immigrant background.

Chapter 6 discusses the role of religion in prison. Building on recent research which has looked at the increased significance of Islam in the prison environment, this chapter discusses the features unique to the prison environment that have an influence of religious adherence and practise amongst Muslim offenders. It looks at intrinsic and extrinsic uses of religion in the prison environment. The chapter outlines the significance of religious teachings in which sufferings and trials are part of a spiritual journey; this understanding becomes important in making sense of the pains, stigma and deprivations associated with imprisonment.

Participants also saw religious moral rules as important in helping them develop aspirational ideals through which they could refashion social relationships they had outside prison. Seeing suffering as part of a divine plan and focusing on building aspirational social roles were two ways in which a focus on religion helped participants manage their time in prison. Along with this, in this chapter the significance of racialisation of religion are particularly stark, participants who reported being casual Muslims with little practise and interest in Islam, reported becoming interested in religion due to experiences of negative treatment and alienation inside prison. These experiences led them to form closer bonds with other Muslim prisoners for protection. This closer bonding and increased interest in religion was specific to prison environments in which participants felt a latent sense of racism from prison staff and other prisoners. Although religion was an important influence on identity, neighbourhood connection and type of crime committed remained important sources of social connection and status in prison.

In Chapter 8, I discuss factors that impact on identity creation post release from prison. I also look at whether changes to religious identity that are brought about through incarceration are sustained after release. This chapter focuses on desistance as a relational process influenced by the social bonds and roles participants occupy once they leave prison. This chapter discusses the complex relationship between religious belief, desistance from crime and continued offending. For older participants religious communities offered the opportunity to make a new set of pro-social relationships. Along with this, generative concerns were well encapsulated within religious language and helped participants to develop a new set of goals. For some participants spiritual sensemaking and ideas of temptation and fate remained powerful in neutralising their involvement in crime; such participants held on to the aspiration that they would move away from crime in the future.

Chapter 9 concludes the thesis by bringing together the main research findings. It discusses the main influences on identity at each stage in the life course. It looks at the theoretical implications of the research findings, linking the research findings back to the main theoretical themes identified in the introduction. The chapter discusses the relevance of religion in understanding contemporary Muslim identities but also discusses the ways in which religious understanding evolves and shifts based on the broader social context and age stage. Importantly it contextualises the importance of religion by discussing the significance of gender, ethnicity and class in influencing identity in the life stories of Muslim offenders.

Conclusion:

Islam and its influence on the identity of male adherents of the faith has been the subject of much social policy and public speculation. This is particularly relevant with relation to the role of religion in leading to a sense of alienation from wider society and the development of a resistant identity which rejects the wider social order and makes Muslim men a threat to social order and cohesion. Along with this, Muslim men in Western Europe and Britain represent a minority which is socio-economically marginalised and regarded as the 'dangerous other'. In such a context this research draws on life stories of Muslim offenders to understand the role of religion in shaping identity, behaviour, actions and social relations. The next chapter outlines some of the key texts drawn from sociology, anthropology and criminology to develop a theoretical framework for data analysis.

2: Literature Review

The influence of religion on the identity of British Muslim offenders is a relatively underexplored research area. Most research on Muslim offenders has focused on the relationship between Islam and violent extremism; or more recently there has been a focus on Islam specifically in the prison environment. However, Muslim's convicted of terrorist offences make up only 175 of the total Muslims offender population in prison. Moreover, little is known of the life experiences of Muslim prisoners prior to incarceration and after release. This research expands the focus beyond radicalisation as well as Muslim offenders in prison and prioritises understanding religious identity over the life course for Muslim offenders convicted for a range of crimes. As this is the first project of this kind, in this chapter I develop a theoretical framework which draws on multiple bodies of literature to explore themes related to understanding the development of religious identity over the life course for Muslim offenders. I start by discussing literature on the cultural identity of British Muslim men in sociology and anthropology. I discuss the significance of religion as an influence on identity within a secular modern social order. An important aspect of this research is to understand the influence of imprisonment on the religious identity of Muslim offenders, this research therefore also outlines research on identity and religion in prison. The chapter brings together themes related to religion and identity development through an exploration of literature in the fields of anthropology, sociology and criminology.

2.1 Cultural Identity and British Muslim men

‘European anxieties and phobias in relation to immigration and cultural diversity focus on Muslims more than any other group. This does however beg the question: in which way are Muslims a group and to whom are they being compared?’ Modood 2004: 100

Cultural identity is a central theme within sociological and anthropological research with impact beyond the academe as well. Multi-ethnic and religiously plural societies give rise to questions about how and to which groups, people decide to identify. Processes of immigration, bring to the fore questions about how people on the move, understand their own identities in shifting social circumstances. This in turn is seen as impacting on the identities and social formations of indigenous populations in countries with high inward migration.

These concerns are central to sociological, anthropological as well as public debate and have given rise to several key questions around the construction and significance of cultural identities. Are cultural identities pre-established and fully formed, unaffected by movement and migration or should they be seen as narration, with shifting significance, formed through reflexive engagement with diversity and difference? Do cultural identities lead to a search for past histories and ‘roots’ or are they a way of building a connection between past histories and present reality? These board debates provide a canvas for understanding processes through which British Muslim men discursively construct and perform their own identities.

Scholarly as well as public discourse on British Muslims has focused on adherence to Islam as an obstacle to social and cultural integration (Modood, 2003). With Muslims representing one of the largest immigrant communities in Europe, Islam has come to represent a symbolic division between native populations and immigrants (Marranci, 2004). In contemporary Britain, moral panics about Islam started around protests by Muslims against the publication of the Satanic Verses by Salman Rushdie in the 1980s (Runnymede, 2017). Since then a series of ‘spectacular’ moments have continued to fuel anti-Muslim prejudice, these include anti-war protests against the first gulf war, the attacks on the World trade centre in 2001, the war on terror, and most significantly in the British context the 7/7 bombings on the London underground in 2005. The 2005 bombing represented a critical moment, as public and media discourse on ‘home grown’ terrorists gave rise to concern of British Muslims being ‘the enemy within;’ explanations of the 7/7 bomb attacks focused on ‘parallel lives,’ ‘generational clash’ and a ‘crisis of identity’ as some of the factors that were at play in making British Muslim youth alienated, disaffected and prone to radicalisation (Seidler, 2007). Since the 2005 bombing, British Muslim fighters travelling to Syria to support ISIS and continued Islamist terror attacks in Britain (the most recent of which have been the bombing at an Ariana Grande concert in Manchester and attacks on Westminster Bridge in London) have meant that questions around the alienation and radicalisation of British Muslims have remained a central public and policy concern.

The Runnymede Trust’s reports on Islamophobia (1997, 2018) bring together antipathy towards Islam as a religious ideology and set of practises along with highlighting discrimination towards Muslims. The reports highlight the impact that the fear of Islam as religious ideology and practise has on attitudes towards Muslims. Claire Alexander suggests that anti-Muslim sentiment or Islamophobia is justified through a slight of hand which tries to

obscure the connections between such discourse and historical orientalist as well as racist discourses (Runnymede, 2017). She argues that hostility towards the Muslim presence in Britain has a longer history and is another form of the 'new racist' paradigm which focuses on cultural or religious practises rather than ethnic or racial characteristics.

In *The Art of Being Black*, Alexander (1996) discusses how black immigrants from the time of their arrival in Britain were regarded as 'threatening', alien and unassimilable in British society. She argues that current forms of Islamophobia echo similar ideas of a Native British identity which is seen as coherent, fixed and closed to mixing with the immigrant 'other' (Runnymede, 2017). These ideas of essential cultural difference are seen to be central to 'new' forms of racism. Alexander points to the longer history of how groups represented within the category of 'Muslim' have also faced racist stereotyping as 'coloured', 'black' and as 'Pakis' or 'Asians'. Whilst the labelling may have changed the racist discourse remains the same as it posits these groupings as closed, homogenous, outside of and in opposition to Britishness, with similar stereotypes of poverty, identity crisis, civilizational clash, criminality, misogyny and as representative of an underclass. These stereotypes remain at play in the 'framing' of 'spectacular' moments which then fuels further anti-Muslim sentiment. The focus on Muslim culture and discussion of adherence to Islam being a choice rather than an inscribed attribute are used to obscure the racist underpinning of anti-Muslim discourse which blames the victims for the inequality and discrimination they face.

At the root of much racist discourse are ideas of 'culture', 'identity' and 'religion' as external, fixed and closed categories. Racism rather than being limited to hatred on the basis of biological markers is the positing of universal differences between different groups or cultures, as well as seeing the comingling of two cultures or groups as a threat (Werbner and Modood, 2015). The continued positioning of British Muslims as a homogenous group in opposition to and in a 'civilisational clash' with Western society fits within this definition. This makes studies of cultural identity, race and racism central to understanding contemporary British Muslim identity.

Barth's (1969) work on ethnicity and culture is considered seminal in moving away from understanding culture as bounded entities or ethnic identity as primitive connections. He outlined an approach which saw cultures as developing through the negotiations of boundaries between groups of people (Barth, 1969). Barth's analytic lens prioritised the

freedom available to move across these constructed boundaries and to form new connections through learning new cultural codes. This approach emphasised the importance of understanding culture as symbolic of boundaries which are transcended through interaction and engagement across such divisions. Furthermore, it pointed to interdependence between differing ethnic groups.

Barth's interactional perspective viewed ethnic divisions as emerging through relational processes of inclusion and exclusion. This conception was distinctive as it prioritised an equal status between different groupings within prevailing power structures. Whilst this approach was significant in deconstructing the essentialism of anthropological approaches to ethnic identity and culture, its conception of an equal relationship between different social groupings was far from being achieved within any society. Instead ethnic ascription usually occurs within unequal power structures in which minority groups are limited in participating fully within the social order (Alexander, 1996).

Building on a Barthian approach to ethnicity Jenkins (1994) differentiates between categorisation which can be an external labelling or what it means to belong to a category such as an ethnic group and the internal identity or experience of individuals who are part of such a collective ethnic identity. The self-image and public image become intertwined in the negotiation of meanings and understandings that is the basis of a collective identity. These processes of social interaction are influenced by power and authority which operate within a society. Categorisation by those with power can 'alter the world and the experience of living in it' (Jenkins, 1994; 218). This categorisation is understood as occurring in the day to day as well as forming part of historical memory or context. Although Jenkins focuses on ethnic identity he suggests that these relational processes of meaning making are central to all aspects of social identity (Jenkins, 1994).

Stuart Hall (1989), suggests that we should regard

'Identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within not outside representation.'

For Hall (1989), identity is always based in everyday social and economic conditions not in cultural or ideological constructs. Through such an approach Hall opens up a space for

dialogic construction and hybridity but still keeps issues of power and inequality central to any discussion around identity. For Hall (1989), British society is made up of multiple and fluid ethnicities and identities; these ethnicities are influenced by local and as well global forces. He argues that individuals create identity through positionalities that are constantly fluctuating. Hall expands the concept of identity by also focusing on the gaze of the 'other' in developing a sense of self. He argues that 'new ethnicities' develop when particular signifiers of identity, such as the colour of your skin or religion, acquire particular political and social salience. In that moment that signifier can become a form of collective identification, even though the people included within the signifier will have differences based on a variety of other factors such as class, gender or ethnic background. Through a rearticulating of the meaning of such signifiers, a politics of identity can emerge which allows 'the margins to speak' for themselves. Hall (1989) regards identity as emerging from a cultural plurality which is constantly evolving and changing. Hall's work gave rise to a burgeoning literature which focused on the ethical and political power of cultural hybridity as a way of empowering minority groups (Bhabha, Bhabha. and Bhabha, 1994).

This focus on cultures as hybrid is important in breaking down the essentialism surrounding categories such as 'culture', 'ethnic belonging', 'race', gender and class. Moving away from essentialism- social categories and the inequalities, self-identifications and social belonging these categories represent are discussed through a relational approach. A key focus for hybridity study is the emphasis on agency rather than authenticity in understanding identities that lie 'in-between forms of identification that may be asymmetrical, disjunctive and contradictory' (Werbner and Modood, 2015). This attention to cultural hybridity discusses socially heterogeneous groups that act as an interruptive, emancipatory force working through local vernacular cosmopolitans, emphasising local culture and tradition yet actively fighting for democracy and equality. Thus, cultural hybridity argues for an identity which is reflexively created through a sense of rootedness in 'mosaic' identities, as well as having a sense of social responsibility towards others (Werbner and Modood, 2015).

Bhabha's work on hybridity focuses on 'splitting' where a cultural object or custom in a new location acquires new meaning while retaining some of its old meanings as well. This form of critique works with present cultural forms to understand the social and psychic interstices through which cultural symbols retain similitude as well as express alterity. This understanding has particular salience for this research as the significance of religious customs

and practises, amongst a group of Muslim offenders from diverse ethnic backgrounds, most of whom are second and third generation migrants from differing countries of origin, and some of whom are born Muslims while others are converts to Islam, requires an understanding of ways in which customs and rituals maintain cultural similitude as well as allow for expressions of alterity. This transformative understanding of cultural objects and customs is also pertinent to understanding the significance religious practise and objects may acquire in specific contexts, such as the prison environment.

Yet this focus on cultural transcendence has limits, most importantly the continuing significance of essentialising ideologies, race, racism and xenophobia points to the limits of cultural hybridity. British Muslim political action has drawn attention to discrimination within social institutions on the basis of religion as separate to ethnic identity (Werbner and Modood, 2015). It has focused on the severe levels of poverty and social exclusion of ethnic groups that tend to be predominantly Muslim such as Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities (Runnymede, 2017). Along with this British Muslim activism has raised questions about the role of minority faiths in the public sphere (Modood, 2003).

This research draws from this literature which focuses on cultural hybridity as central to processes of identity creation, in which cultural identities are seen as creative, emancipatory and agentic. It prioritises micro-level experiences of British Muslim offenders and uses these to illustrate the diverse life experiences and choices of a group which is externally regarded as homogenous.

So far, I have focused on the ‘cultural’ identity ascribed to British Muslims and outlined literature related to cultural identity and ethnicity which is relevant to understanding contemporary British Muslim identity. However, reducing religion to the politics of rights and identity is limiting as religion is articulated and embodied in ways that are not just limited to rights and grievance (Mahmood, 2009). Furthermore, Islam as a system of faith has also been juxtaposed in opposition to secular rationalism, which is regarded as one of the key tenants of modernity. This requires a discussion around definitions of religion and secular rationalism which are at play in creating this binary. I draw from sociological studies of religion to outline useful analytic categories which help in moving beyond the dualism represented by secular rationalism and Muslim religious adherence.

2.2 Secular rationalism and Islamic identity:

Since the inception of the social sciences, religion and its changing role in the social, economic and political spheres within society has preoccupied social scientists and philosophers (Habermas, 1984, 2008). Theorists from a range of perspectives have outlined the powerful role played by religion in defining social norms and practises in different historical periods ranging from primitive to contemporary society (Marx, 1843; Durkheim, 1912; Weber, 1930; Habermas, 2008). The separation of religion from the spheres of economics and politics is a central theme in the changes associated with modernity (Luckmann, 1970). Casanova (2001) suggests that modern society emerged on the basis of the following parallel and intertwined developments that occurred during the early nineteenth century: The Protestant reformation, the formation of nation states, the growth of capitalism, and the early modern scientific revolution. These led to significant changes in the role and importance of religion in modern society. Processes of secularisation include the relegation of religion to the private sphere, the demystification of religion through scientific and rational knowledge, and declining rates of religiosity in modern societies (Casanova 2001).

A key text for understanding this separation of religion from the public sphere is Durkheim's work on the sacred and the profane. Early sociological research on religion explained its importance as an inextricably social phenomenon; for Durkheim (1912), morality defined and enforced through religion was a reflection of social order and organisation. Religion was a way of signalling belonging to a social group and a way of emphasising the importance of collective values and goals by limiting the importance of individualistic desires (Durkheim, 1912). Religion's primary functions therefore, were social control and creating a group identity. By emphasising collective goals and objectives, religion set limits to individual actions considered at odds with the collective needs of the group (Ellwood, 1918). Group belonging was displayed through identifying with shared symbols and participating in collective rituals (Durkheim, 1912).

Durkheim (1912) spoke about the separation of religion from the social order by drawing a distinction between the sacred and profane in modern society. The sacred domain contained all objects and symbols that were seen as requiring special religiously-determined treatment. The sacred object could only be approached through special rituals and was treated differently from other ordinary objects. The profane included everyday life which was based

on routine and utility. The sacred and profane were seen as separate realms, the coming together of which would create impurity in the sacred. The separation of the two realms was seen as a precursor to the end of religion in modern society. For Durkheim, national identity was the secular equivalent of religion: it provided a sense of collective identity. Along with this, the legal system was the new secular mechanism of social control. Like many modernist social scientists, Durkheim predicted the end of religion as an aspect of modern society.

Durkheim's approach although valuable had certain limitations. Most importantly his work was criticised for its positivist ontology and his reification of the 'sacred' and 'profane'. 'Durkheim's approach to religion is developed in the work of Maurice Bloch (2008) who agrees with Durkheim that religion is central to human sociability. He argues that human consciousness has the ability to imagine intangible things based on the descriptions and experiences of others. This transcendental realm is created through the fluid boundaries that separate individual consciousness, and this ability to form a shared understanding is used to develop idealised social roles which underpin social interaction. These shared ideas may not be completely understood by all individuals, yet they are valued because they create a sense of shared understanding (Bloch, 2008). This unique aspect of human social organisation is central to group belonging.

This 'transcendental' realm of social sense-making is where religion is located along with other ideational aspects of identity such as descent groups, dead ancestors and the nation. Religion as one of the representations of this realm exercises control and influence on the individual by offering transcendental aspirational social roles and identities. Transcendental social refers to essentialized roles and groups which are based on intangible ideals. The social roles in the transcendental social are based on idealised rules that determine norms and expectation of behaviour and are independent of the individual occupying the role in actuality. The social roles are set within imagined communities. Bloch builds on Anderson's (1991) work on imagined communities to argue that as part of the transcendental realm, individuals can hold ideas of group belonging that are not based on any shared tangible recent history, or common traits or goals.

The transcendental includes things with no tangible presence such as dead ancestors, historical figures or events, and the supernatural. It also contains a multiplicity of group ties which can be kinship ties and affiliations, as well as religious or national connections. In this

regard, the transcendental realm helps individuals imagine belonging to many communities. This is different from Durkheim's idea of the conscience collective which was linked to a unified identity within bounded social groups (Bloch, 2008). The key difference is that individuals can imagine belonging to many different communities simultaneously. Some of their affiliations can be overlapping – for example ethnic and religious community may overlap – and some community affiliations exist parallel to each other, for example neighbourhood communities are parallel to religious or ethnic communities, and individuals move easily between the two.

Bloch (2008) also develops Durkheim's (1912) work on religion by discussing how the social roles included in the transcendental (sacred) relate to both the spiritual and the transactional (profane) realms. His approach moves away from the binary suggested by Durkheim (1912) in which the sacred and profane are considered two separate realms. Transactional social refers to the manoeuvrings and day to day actions of individuals to garner power within their social setting. The transcendental and transactional social build on the ideas of the sacred and profane as outlined by Durkheim, however Bloch argues that the two are not separate and distinct but can merge and influence each other. In fact, the transcendental can be used within transactional power manoeuvres. This understanding of religion, which shows the intermingling of the transactional with the transcendental, is useful in understanding the importance of religion in the lives of individuals.

While, it is important to understand the influence of religion as an aspect of the transcendental, it is neither the primary nor the sole influence. It is necessary to make the whole of the transcendental social the subject of study in order to understand the complex factors and sense-making that influence the identity and group affiliation of the participants (Bloch, 2008). This conceptualisation of religion not only explains its importance but also contextualises it by placing it with other aspects of the transcendental social, which contains other ideological influences such as nationalism and ancestry (as suggested by Bloch) along with factors that influence identity such as race, gender, age and ethnicity.

Bloch's approach extended understanding of religion, in particular by building up from micro level interaction to explaining social roles and collective ideas and bonds. However, his research was located within a Madagascan tribe and has not been used to understand contemporary religious practise or faith. In this thesis, themes outlined by Bloch are seen as

central to explaining religious practise. The thesis outlines the merging and confluence of the transcendental and transactional realms in the everyday life of research participants. It discusses the ways in which religion influences social roles and relationships and it discusses both the significance of religion as a form of group affiliation as well as drawing attention to other ideological and material influences that play an important role in identity development and the forging of social relationships in the lives of the research participants.

Understanding the transcendental social as an ideational space created by individuals through their interpretation of the many factors that jostle to influence it also helps explain how religion is both a collective as well as an individualised belief system. These differences highlight the agency of individuals in reflexively creating identity in circumstances that are restrained by multiple social forces. Cahill (1998) makes a similar point: he argues that the self needs to be understood as developing within a context that includes present circumstances, but also takes into account the historical and cultural settings of individuals.

Post-modernist accounts of religious identity also prioritise the constructed and shifting nature of religious beliefs (Heelas, Martin and Morris, 1998). Rather than seeing religion as an external force influencing the choices and behaviour of individuals, religion is regarded as malleable: it transforms, and shifts based on continually changing realities. Religious identity is thus crafted through various influences, all of which do not derive from any single source (Orsi, 2008). Postmodern accounts emphasise critique, reflection and individualisation as being at the heart of religious practise and adherence (Heelas, Martin and Morris, 1998). The plurality of sources for religious knowledge and the emphasis on personal interpretation and reflection is discussed in relation to processes of individuation, through which participants develop mature adult identities, in which they draw from early childhood experiences and religious teachings but emphasise finding their own personal understanding and practise of faith as being an important part of becoming an adult.

Essentialised definitions of Islam have been criticised in recent times as failing to incorporate the differences in practise and meaning of religion across ethnic, national and sectarian differences (Ahmed, 2015). Muslims in Britain are one of the most diverse groups, making up more than 170 nationalities. Even amongst South Asian Muslims, who make up a majority of Muslims in the UK, there are many different religious sects and ethnic divisions (Lewis, 1994). Yet it is also relevant that there is a common identification of being Muslim or being

an adherent of Islam that is acknowledged and important to individuals who affiliate with the religion. Incorporating the differences as well as the commonalities across the different sects, nationalities and ethnicities that identify as Muslim has been a challenge for researchers on religion.

Recent research suggests that seeing Islam as a hermeneutic engagement with scriptural texts is the common feature which can bring together conflicting practises and beliefs along with accommodating the commonality generated through a shared common language (Ahmed, 2015). The texts, which include the Quran, (divine book of revelation) and collection of Ahadis, (sayings of the Prophet Mohammad) are the basis of a common language used to make 'Islamic' claims (Ahmed, 2015). The texts however, are interpreted in varying and contradictory ways, leading to variation and diversity within the collective. These differing approaches to religion and different identities within the Muslim collective are an inherent part of Islamic thought and culture (Ahmed, 2015; Iqtidar, 2016).

Mahmood (2005) suggests that religion involves the construction of a pious self through interpretation and agentive adherence to religious moral codes. The creation of a pious self involves practising self-control and sacrifice which is linked to a spiritual reconstruction (Mahmood, 2005). This process which is ongoing throughout the life of the believer in which new habits, practises and ideas are constantly learnt, developed and embodied is the source of satisfaction and peace of mind for the adherent. This understanding of religion as a process developing over the course of the life allows for insights into active agency, the construction of discourse and the embodying of practises that are important for the individual. It explains more fully the meaning of active submission to a faith and the processual development of religious identity.

Moving beyond essentialised ideas of Islam as a monolithic faith identity. This research picks from these perspectives and focuses on the ways in which individuals attach meaning to their faith and what they consider significant when they discuss religious ritual, practises or beliefs. It develops an understanding of religious identity as a process which unfolds over the life course and prioritises understanding the meaning and importance of shifts as and when they occur in the life stories.

This research draws on these theories of religion and identity development to understand the processes of identity creation in contemporary society. I now turn to consider the effects of

modern day incarceration on the identity of prisoners and discuss what is known of the role of religion within this context.

2.3 Social Identity in Prison

As this research is interested in understanding religious identity amongst Muslim offenders, it is important to outline the effects of incarceration on identity. Building on the discussion on religion and identity, this section focuses on the nature of modern day incarceration and its impact on identity and social relations amongst prisoners. I start by outlining the importance of imprisonment as a form of punishment and control. I then examine the impact of internal prison rules and structure on these processes of identity formation and look at the external influences from outside prison that have an impact on social relations inside prison. This section then moves on to examine these complex internal mechanisms and external influences in relation to racial affiliation and religious identity in prison.

2.3.1. The political economy of crime and punishment

The prison as the primary mode of punishment exercised by the modern liberal state has been at the centre of social research on crime, punishment and control (Jewkes, 2007). The political economy of punishment, since the early work of Rusche and Kirchheimer (1939), has long since concerned itself with the links between punishment, economic forces, and the containment of those marginalised and ‘othered’ in society. Social theory, particularly Foucault (1979), has placed special emphasis on understanding prisons as central to the modern penal system. Foucault suggests that prisons represent a new form of power and discipline within society. In his historical analysis of the emergence of prisons, Foucault (1979) examined how seemingly egalitarian laws and values were used to create bourgeois dominance in the course of the eighteenth century. For Foucault, although imprisonment was couched in terms of rehabilitation and progress, its effects were the opposite: the creation of a socially excluded group of deviants and outcasts (Foucault, 1979).

These ideas have been used by Wacquant (2005) to examine the role criminal justice and imprisonment play in exacerbating racial differentials and inequalities in American society. In later work, Wacquant further expanded on this, calling prisons places of containment for

‘human rejects of the market’ (Wacquant, 2009) or the ‘wretched of the city’ (Wacquant, 2008). Prisons have also been linked to the emergence and management of the underclasses in liberal democracies in which prison populations increase and fall depending on the level of labour supply required for economic production (Garland, 2002). These studies indicate the importance of prisons in the institutional order of society and the increased significance the prison can acquire in the lives of those that are already marginalised and vulnerable in society due to their disadvantaged socioeconomic position.

The increasing number of Muslims in UK prisons has made religious identity a new area of research in this setting. Table 1 shows that Muslims make up 5% of the national population and 13% of the prison population.

Table 1

Percentage of Muslims in the community and in prison

| Percentage of Muslims in the general population (ONS data) | Percentage of Muslims in the prison population (MOJ data) |
|--|---|
| 5% | 15% of total prison population 25% in YOI and high security prisons |

There is no clear explanation for this increase in the number of Muslim offenders in prisons. The discrepancy can be explained to some extent by the demographics of Muslims in the UK as they tend to be from the lowest socioeconomic group and tend to be younger in age (Phillips, 2009). Studies of ethnic inequality clearly identify those of Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslim origin as being hugely disadvantaged in labour market participation and their being found in the lowest percentiles of income (Heath and Cheung, 2006; Phillips, 2009). Both socioeconomic disadvantage and young age are considered risk factors which increase the likelihood of becoming involved in criminality (HMIP 2010).

Along with this, the Young Review (Young, 2014) into the experiences of black and Muslim offenders identified negative stereotyping and experiences of poverty as two of the factors contributing to the marginalisation of black and Muslim men and their disproportionate representation within the prison population. The recent Lammy Review (2017) outlined gaps

in information about outcomes for different religious groups at different stages of the Criminal Justice System. It recommended that the CPS should collect data about the religious affiliation of people facing prosecution to allow for more transparency around the experiences of Muslims through all stages of the Criminal Justice System. Along with this, media speculation has focused on conversion to Islam⁶ inside prison as a factor which has led to an increase in the number of Muslims in prisons. Understanding social identity, particularly amongst Muslim offenders in prison, becomes a pressing concern within this context.

2.32. Identity in Prisons

Irving Goffman's (1961) research on asylums was one of the first sociological texts to examine the impact of incarceration on the self. He compared mental hospitals to prisons, concentration camps, military training camps and monasteries. Goffman (1961) argued that each of these institutions represented what he called a total institution. In total institutions, individuals are separated from the rest of society and their identity is completely stripped and recreated according to the principles of the institution. This stripping of identity involves various processes of mortification of the self through which the identity of the individual is dismantled, after which the individual adopts the institutional definitions and understanding of him or herself.

Classic ethnographic studies conducted within prisons in the USA in the 1960s and 70s built on and critiqued Goffman's work. These are considered key texts which outlined the effects and impact of incarceration on individuals. In these texts, two main models of understanding incarceration are outlined. The first is the deprivation model suggested by Gresham Sykes in his study of Trenton prison in the USA (Sykes, 1958). Sykes (1958) suggests that the deprivations that are part of the prison experience – what he calls the 'pains of imprisonment' – are as painful and damaging to the individual as the forms of physical punishment prisons had replaced. These pains of imprisonment include loss of liberty and goods and services; lack of autonomy and personal safety; and the absence of heterosexual and other familial relationships.

⁶ 'One in five young prisoners are Muslim, report reveals' *Guardian* 2012.

The impact of these deprivations leads to adaptations and changes in the identity of the prisoner, which are a unique feature of the prison environment. Sykes (1958) argues that in order to survive these pains of imprisonment, inmates develop a code of behaviour and prisoner solidarity against the guards. A hierarchical structure of differentiated social roles for prisoners also emerges, which creates a division of labour within prison. Prisoners develop new identities based on the inmate code and the social role they adopt within the prison division of labour. These processes of identity creation, social solidarity and role differentiation are all indigenous to the prison environment.

In contrast to this, the importation model argues that identities within prison are an extension of life on the road. Irwin and Cressey suggest that it is misleading to think that culture and roles within prison are purely determined by the rules of the institution (Irwin and Cressey, 1962). Instead they argue that it is social roles that prisoners occupied on the outside that influence and impact identity on the inside. This leads to different subcultures and groups within prisons instead of a cohesive inmate society as suggested by Sykes. Irwin and Cressey (1962) outline three distinct inmate subcultures: the ‘thief’ subculture, the ‘inmate’ subculture, and the ‘legitimate’ subculture. For Irwin and Cressey (1962) the ‘thief’ and ‘legitimate’ subcultures derive from values outside of prison. Therefore, they suggest that the inmate society is influenced by and reflects changes on the outside.

Initially the deprivation model and the importation model of incarceration were thought to stand in opposition to one another. Donald Clemmers (1958) concept of prisonisation⁷ however, includes features that prisoners bring from the outside along with mechanisms and dynamics that are produced within inmate relationships inside the prison (Clemmer, 1958). Recent research supports Clemmers’ approach and proposes that prisons are a complex mix of internal structuring and external influence (Crewe, 2005; Jewkes, 2005)

Along with this, recent research proposes that fundamental changes to the prison regime in England and Wales mean that current day incarceration is very different to the prisons Sykes, Irwin and Cressey and Clemmers were writing about (Crewe, 2011). Ben Crewe’s ethnographic study of two male prisons outlines the changes in prison regime that have

⁷ Clemmers used the term prisonisation to describe the mechanisms of socialisation through which inmates developed identity and solidarity within prison.

occurred over the last few decades. The new prison regime includes the system of Incentives and Earned Privileges⁸ (IEP), indeterminate sentencing, a series of self-change courses with which prisoners have to engage, and constant risk and psychological assessments. He suggests that these changes have altered the nature of the pains of imprisonment; he argues that they have led to a less physically brutal prison regime. There is however a new layer to the pains of modern day imprisonment which is ontological insecurity amongst prisoners about their future. This is accompanied by a sense of anxiety regarding self-identity and survival within modern total institutions.

Crewe (2011) uses the term ‘grip’ to explain how these changes have led to a ‘lighter but tighter’ grip on prisoners, in which there are many mechanisms of control that ensure compliance. Therefore, while the exercise of power is softer, its grip on prisoners is tighter (Crewe, 2011). Elsewhere though, he suggests that whilst this leads to outward compliance from prisoners, there is still a range of prisoner orientations – from normative commitment to backstage resistance – behind this transcript of outward compliance (Crewe, 2007), .

Phillips (2012) argues that social identity within prison should be understood as a crafting of masculinities (with both its positive and negative features); racial and religious identity (which can include inter-racial conflict and cooperation); and local identities forged on the local area in which the prisoners lived prior to incarceration (these can be multicultural or racially homogenous). Understanding these influences which are external to the prison environment is a crucial part of understanding the creation of self and response to others in the multicultural prison experience. Understanding the influence of variables such as race, religion, class and gender on a prisoner’s crafting of their identity and their treatment in prison is also useful, as it outlines the mechanisms through which some of the broader macro level differentials are perpetuated (Phillips 2012). This suggests that race, religion and masculinity are important features that should be part of any understanding of inmate relations, self-identity and social solidarity within prison.

⁸ The IEP is a system by which prisoners can gain privileges and benefits (such as a television and movement to the enhanced wing) on the basis of compliance and good behaviour.

2.33. Race, Religion and Politicisation

Research on prisons has traditionally paid attention to racial affiliation as a significant feature in understanding the inmate society (Genders and Players, 1989; Cheliotis and Liebling, 2005). This is due to the fact that race issues affect all aspects of prison life such as individual identity formation; social cohesion; difference and belonging; staff and prisoner relationships; equal social participation; and equality of treatment of prisoners (Phillips and Earle 2007; Bowling and Phillips 2002; Phillips 2012). Along with this, academic inquiry has also highlighted issues of discrimination and prejudice within prisons on the basis of ethnic background (Genders and Players; Phillips 2007; Bowling and Phillips 2002; Cheliotis and Liebling 2006) and religious affiliation (Beckford and Gilliat 1998; Beckford, Joly, and Khosrokhavar 2005). Differential treatment of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) prisoners has also been highlighted by the Commission of Racial Equality (CRE, 2003a, 2003b) inquiry following the racist murder of Zahid Mubarek⁹ by his cell mate whilst in prison. Recent research suggests that while outward discrimination, violence and racism have been reduced in the prison environment following the CRE inquiry (mentioned above) latent expressions and impressions of racial difference and discrimination are still significant for prisoners in terms of self-identity and interaction with prison staff (Phillips 2012).

Beckford, Joly, and Khosrokhavar's (2005) comparative study of UK and French prisons suggested that the British model of multicultural accommodation (which provided for and recognised difference on the basis of faith) was an important factor which led to lesser levels of resentment and alienation amongst Muslims in British prisons as compared to Muslims in French prisons. However, a recent inspectorate report on the experiences of Muslims in UK prisons found that Muslims tended to report less positively about their prison experience compared to non-Muslims (HMIP, 2010). The factors on which Muslims reported negatively were feeling safe and secure in prison and their relationship with staff and other prisoners. This was especially true for the high security prison estate where three quarters of Muslims felt unsafe and were mistrustful of staff (HMIP 2010).

⁹ Zahid Mubarek was an Asian teenager who was brutally beaten to death by his racist cell mate at Feltham Young Offender's Institute in March 2000. A public inquiry was ordered into the circumstances of his death which revealed witting negligence on the part of prison staff.

The key grievance of Muslim prisoners was that they felt they were treated as a homogenous group and through the lens of extremism and terrorism. There was however, still a significant difference on the basis of race and ethnicity in the level of negative experience and perceptions of the Muslims surveyed for the inspectorate report. Thus, white Muslims were most likely to report positively, and mixed heritage or black Muslim prisoners felt least positive about their prison experience. Despite this, in each of the ethnic sub-groups, religion added an additional layer of perceived negative experience, with Muslims reporting more negatively than non-Muslims about their prison experience. Along with this, Muslims of non-Asian origin felt that they were not seen as real Muslims and therefore treated with increased suspicion. The findings of the inspectorate report indicate that Muslims of black and mixed heritage were the most alienated and disadvantaged group inside prison.

This suggests that both race and religion play a role in perceptions and experiences of discrimination inside prison (HMIP 2010). Recent research also suggests that faith provision can lead to resentment and antagonism between faith groups as different faith groups can see the 'other' as more advantaged (Phillips 2012; Liebling, Arnold and Straub 2011). Using religious and racial affiliation to gain extra privileges inside prison can lead to resentment from prisoners who are unable to make similar claims (Phillips 2012; Liebling, et al 2011).

A study of Stateville, a maximum-security prison in the USA, in the 1960s and 70s documents similar resentment and fragmentation amongst different religious and racial groups. Jacobs (1977) suggests that due to the political religious mobilisation of Black Muslims, interaction between groups of prisoners as well as prisoners' interaction with staff fragmented. This led to what Jacobs (1977) calls the 'balkanization of the prison population', which segmented across ethnic and religious lines. Liebling et al. (2011) find similar trends in their study of HMP Whitemoor, raising concerns that the prison population in Britain may be fragmenting across racial and religious lines. Phillips' (2012a) research in two medium security prisons suggests that such gang divisions were not part of the prison experience in this part of the prison estate, however racist violence amongst prisoners remained an aspect of the prison environment.

Phillips (2012b) uses the concept of conviviality to describe the interaction between different ethnic and religious groups. She suggests that this term with all its ambiguities and tensions is a better reflection of relations amongst individuals from different racial and religious groups.

Drawing on the work of Gilroy (2004), Phillips (2012) suggests that the hybrid multiculturalism outlined in Gilroy's (2004) work is an accurate model for describing relations amongst ethnic and religious groups inside prison. She further expands on this by noting the tensions and cooperation amongst different groups in areas within prison in which prisoners were able to express and exchange cultural aspects of their identity. The self-cook area within prison is one such example in her work, which outlines the cooperation and sharing along with the tensions and strains that are part of life within the multicultural prison (Earle and Phillips, 2012). Recent research has also looked at religious belonging as a significant feature which influences the key issues of social identity, solidarity and interaction amongst prisoners and their interaction with staff (Phillips 2012; Liebling Arnold and Straubb 2011).

2.34. Conversion in Prison: the contradictions

Recent interest in religion inside prison has focused specifically on the significance of adopting an Islamic identity in the prison environment. This has been warranted by concerns (already outlined) that affiliation with Islam in prison might be an indicator or first step in political and radical transformation which leads to terrorism (Hamm forthcoming; Hannah, Clutterbuck & Rubin 2008; Liebling, Arnold and Straub 2011).

Concerns regarding radicalisation¹⁰ of the prison population are based on three key trends noted within prisons: the first is that Islam is one of the fastest growing religions in prisons in the UK and USA (Hamm, 2009); second, some of the most sophisticated terror plots uncovered in recent years had their origins in prisons (Hannah, Clutterbuck and Rubin, 2008; Hamm, 2009); and finally, conversion is noted more amongst BME prisoners. These trends suggest that Islamist discourse is gaining significance amongst particular sections of the prison population but there is insufficient research to explain why this is the case.

In their study of HMP Whitemoor, Liebling, Arnold and Straub (2011) suggest that conversion to Islam in some instances was seen as 'crafting' or a fake identity in which conversion to the faith was being used for other agendas. This included power seeking and

¹⁰ For the purposes of this paper, radicalisation is defined as '... the process by which an individual acquires the propensity to engage in acts of terrorism' (Bouhana and Wikstrom, 2011: 6).

challenging authority. Liebling, Arnold and Straub (2011) suggest that being Muslim was being “used as a ‘cover’ to gain power, freedom and influence” within the prison. Going further, they suggest that in some instances, a part of the Muslim collective operated as an organised gang (with all the negative associations in the use of the term which link it to violence and exploitation) with some hierarchies which could be suppressive and controlling of its members. They further suggest that the incarceration and dispersal of TACT (Terrorism Act 2000) offenders amongst the prison population increases the risk of radicalisation in prisons. This is due to the fact that TACT offenders can continue to work towards their political ambitions even after incarceration. Furthermore, they can continue to radicalise individuals within the confines of imprisonment to gain power inside prison.

Trends towards fragmentation represent further distancing of relations between the majority of prison staff who are ethnically white with varied religious affiliations and an increasingly black and Muslim prison population. Liebling, Arnold and Straub (2011) suggest that the fear and violence associated with radical Islam made it a violent and appealing identity in the prison setting. They argue this appeal was further enhanced by the status of Islam as an ‘underdog’ or ‘outsider’ religion (Hamm 2009 and Liebling et al. 2011), leading to concerns that conversion might suggest increased anti-establishment feelings and radicalisation. Crewe (2007) suggests that resistance in (late modern prisons has been relegated to the backstage and may take symbolic form. This symbolic resistance could manifest itself through identification with an outsider group.

However, moving beyond agency as resistance Williams (2018) work discusses the significance of agency as a means of achieving personhood or freedom within given power structures. Williams research points to different types of acts undertaken by Muslim offenders in prison with the desire to ‘become good’. This articulation of a self which is interested in crafting an ethical self-identity enriches understanding of subjectivities in prison, which have been limited to concerns of control through the institution or resistance against it. Williams research discusses different types of actions that individuals performed which were geared towards the creation of an ethical self and ‘doing good. These included, internal acts such as reading, and external acts such as growing a beard, relational acts of sharing gifts and food with others, and efforts towards developing an ethical community in which good acts are encouraged. For Williams the freedom to choose to act in particular ways was most

significant in these accounts, as it underscored the relational connection between individuals and moral codes (Williams, 2018).

The proposed link between conversion to Islam and radicalisation is also not without contention. Research suggests that forming such a link can be dangerous as it widens the net of social control to a counterproductive degree (Hannah, Clutterbuck and Rubin, 2008; Hamm, 2009; Spalek and Lambert, 2009; Bouhana and Wikström, 2011). There is also no concrete demographic data on the ethnicity and race of converts to Islam in prison or on the levels of conversion to Islam in prison. It is therefore difficult to assess if and to what extent Islam is appealing to certain race groups. Profiling on the basis of ethnicity and religion has also been found to be ineffective within counter terrorism, as the false positives that such an approach bring can lead to an exacerbation of social marginalisation and disconnection of Muslims from larger society, creating grounds that are ideal for radicalisation (Bouhana and Wikström, 2011; Silke, 2011).

Recent research also suggests that prisons are a complex mix of internal structuring and external influence (Jewkes, 2005). Concerns about the Muslim collective could in part be shaped by the external fears and risks associated with Islam and radicalisation which have been internalised by inmates and prison authorities (Phillips 2012; Liebling et al 2011). Such fears would become more tangible and heightened in the enforced close confinement of a prison setting (Phillips 2012; Liebling et al 2011).

The positive use of religion as a coping mechanism within prisons to deal with the ‘pains of imprisonment’ (Sykes 1958) is also a recognised and researched phenomenon (Maruna et al. 2006); to regard all conversion as radicalisation overlooks the rehabilitative effect of conversion noted within prisons. Such a view is proposed by Spalek and El-Hassan (2007) who argue that concerns regarding Islamist radicalisation in prison could be a moral panic phenomenon. In their study of two British prisons, they found that conversion to Islam had a positive moral effect on prisoners and helped them to deal with aggressive and violent behaviour. However, their research was based on a small sample and leaves room for further exploration of this phenomenon.

Liebling, Arnold and Straub’s (2011) research also highlighted that conversion was seen as a form of making sense in a situation where identity was in a state of crisis due to

imprisonment. They suggest that incarceration can make individuals question their previously held values and the purpose and meaning of their life. This causes ontological insecurity which can lead them to look for and adopt 'absolute truths'. Furthermore, research suggests that conversion to Islam can lead to a sense of belonging and protection from a group (Phillips 2012; Liebling, Arnold and Straub 2011). This can be an important factor in what are considered hostile conditions of imprisonment. Spalek & Lambert (2008) and Hamm (2009) also suggest that locally based self-help groups from within the Muslim community and the prison population usually provide the best counter radicalisation interventions. This suggests that religious affiliation and conversion can have a complex relationship with radicalisation.

This section highlights the complex intertwining of external influences and internal mechanisms that impact on the identity of prisoners and the prison environment. It also reaffirms the importance of factors such as race, religion, gender and local communities in the fashioning of identity, differentials in treatment and experience within prison. The contradictory appropriation of Muslim religious identity in the contemporary multicultural religiously plural prison is a new and emerging phenomenon which requires further in-depth examination.

2.4 Gaps in the Literature

This research has identified several research gaps which require further investigation and analysis. To date there has been no exclusive study of the significance of religious identity over the life course of Muslim offenders. There is therefore a lack of longitudinal/ processual research on social identity amongst Muslim offenders, which charts changes as well continuities in the identity of Muslim offenders from childhood through to imprisonment and life after release. Each stage of the life course poses particular identity challenges. It would be important to look specifically at religious identity at each age stage in order to get information which is currently unavailable.

Little is known of the influence of religion on the identity of Muslim offenders prior to their incarceration. Understanding the influence of religion in the lives of offenders prior to incarceration is important as it would draw attention to cultures or values that may justify involvement in crime. The everyday lived experiences of this group would shed light on their

experiences in different social settings, drawing attention to their social and family relationships, their goals and ambitions, their self-identity, as well as their sense of trust and belonging.

Along with this, not much is known about changes that occur to the identities of born-Muslim offenders after conviction and incarceration. A processual approach would allow for insight into the changes and maintenance of identity within this group. There is also a particular need to learn more about religious identification among those who self-identity as Muslim inside prison, but who are of non-Asian origin¹¹ or who have converted to Islam in prison or in the recent past. A look at pre-prison experiences also allows for an understanding of the identity of converts to Islam prior to their conversion, drawing attention to their motivations for conversion, both in prison or outside in the community. There is no in-depth research which systematically documents the changes in identity and self-narratives associated with adopting the Muslim faith amongst offenders. Further research is therefore required to gain insight into this process of identity change. Changes in religious identity need to also be seen in relation to the impact these can potentially have on the level of integration and cohesion amongst prisoners from varying ethnic and religious backgrounds within the prison setting. This research suggests that there is a need for longitudinal study of the intersecting of race and religion in perceptions of alienation inside prison and dissatisfaction in staff-prisoner relationships.

Another important gap in the literature relates to the experiences of Muslim ex-prisoners after they have been released from prison. The high increase in the Muslim prison population over the last decade means that higher numbers of Muslim ex-prisoners will be re-entering society after release. Understanding the influence of ethnicity, race and religion on the desistance and settlement experiences of Muslim offenders is necessary to better facilitate the re-entry experiences of this growing sub-group of offenders.

Based on the gaps in literature outlined above, I developed the following research questions.

¹¹ There is an over representation of black Muslims in the prison population. In the general population, 74 % of Muslims are Asian and 7% black but in prison Asians comprise 42% of the Muslim population and black prisoners make up 34%. (HMIP 2010)

2.5 Research Questions

This research addresses the following overarching research question:

How does Islamic religious affiliation emerge, change, and be sustained among Muslim offenders?

This question was broken down into further questions:

RQ1 How does religious affiliation shape the attitudes, values, behaviour and interactions of offenders prior to their experience of conviction/incarceration?

RQ2 Do these attitudes, values, behaviour and interactions change during incarceration and with what effect on the prison experience?

RQ3 Are changes to attitudes, values, behaviour and interactions that occur during incarceration sustained post release?

Conclusion

The literature outlined in this chapter highlights changing trends in society and the increased importance of affiliation to Islam as significant in influencing attitudes, values, beliefs and social relations both in wider society and within prison. It outlined literature on religious and social identity creation both in prison and in contemporary society. The chapter drew attention to gaps in knowledge about these emerging changes. The research questions aim to bring together concerns around Islam both in wider society and in prison by focusing on the significance of religion over the life course of Muslim offenders. In the next chapter I discuss the methodological underpinnings of this research.

3: Methodology

The previous chapter discussed theoretical debates around identity development and religion in late modern societies and drew attention to the emerging importance of religion in the prison context. In this chapter, I start by laying out the life story approach which was used to understand religious identity development amongst the participants over the course of their lives. This approach was seen as most useful in capturing the richness of detail of participants' lived experience. I then move on to outline the different stages of the research process. The research drew a purposive convenience sample with the help of several organisations that work with offenders. These included third sector organisations working on resettling offenders, the London Probation Trust and a mosque. The research started with in-depth, unstructured, oral life story qualitative interviews to collect information about the participants' lives that they considered significant and important. The data from the first set of interviews were analysed to develop a set of questions for follow-up interviews with each of the participants. The research also used timelines to help participants organise significant chapters in their lives. The final section reflects on the field experiences of the researcher, which outline some of the challenges and unique insights of in-depth qualitative research and the impact of the researcher's gender, ethnicity and background on the research findings.

3.1. Oral life stories

This research uses religious biographies as the means through which to understand the processual creation of social identity amongst Muslim offenders in England and Wales. It follows an oral life story approach, which aims to collect retrospective as well as current information about the significance and role of religion in the lives of the research participants. In the introductory editor's note of a three volume Sage publication on Life Story Research, Harrison (2009) defines life story research as:

“...a number of methodological approaches which put individuals, their lives, their experiences and the contexts in which they are situated, to the forefront of both theoretical and substantive concerns and foci for investigation.” (xxi)

The use of autobiographical narrative by Thomas and Znaniecki in their study of Polish migrants in the USA and Europe during the 1920s is one of the first social scientific studies involving the life story method (Harrison, 2009). In *'The Sociological Imagination'*, C. Wright Mills (1959) also emphasised the importance of individual experience and biographies as a key through which to unlock the historical and structural milieu in which the biographies unfold. Such an approach therefore, allows us to better understand the whole by focusing in detail on key parts of the whole (Becker, 1973; Rustin, 2000). It implicitly assumes the micro-macro linkages that exist between the experiences of individuals and broader social phenomenon. A life story approach which is centred on micro level detail is well suited to uncover and outline the meso level causal mechanisms that make explicit the influence of the micro on macro level structures and vice versa (P Chamberlayne et al., 2000).

For Rustin (2000), biographical accounts are important as these individual accounts provide a means through which social structure and processes can be understood. Rustin argues that by adopting a biographical method, social research reemphasises the importance of the individual as the agent making choices, whether this is a choice between competing discourses or courses of action, as "it is through single cases that self-reflection, decision and action in human lives can best be explored and represented".

The life story method was adopted by the Chicago School in their study of the urban landscape. Attention to micro detail and the use of in-depth case studies to understand broader social structures and social landscape is a key feature of the urban ethnography of the Chicago School during the 1960s. In particular, Clifford Shaw's (Shaw, 1966) seminal work *'The Jack Roller'* is a detailed life history of Stanley, a delinquent boy that Shaw worked with over a number of years. Shaw used in-depth interviews and information from social work and psychological reports available about Stanley to put together a detailed account of Stanley's journey into and out of crime.

For Shaw (1966), the main emphasis within the recounting of Stanley's life story was to provide an empathetic account of Stanley's life. He outlined in detail Stanley's reactions and responses to the different life events and situations he encountered, and the impact of these actions on his life. Shaw saw the telling of the life story as a therapeutic intervention.

However, rather than taking a psychoanalytic approach to explaining unconscious mechanisms in the self-narrative, Shaw focused on conscious memories, desires and attitudes that were reflected in the life story as it was put together over the course of several interviews and interactions (Shaw, 1966). Along with focusing closely on the details of Stanley's life, Shaw situated his story within the neighbourhood and social groups which were significant in Stanley's life. This situating of the life story in the broader social context allowed for insight into the inner-city neighbourhood and its effects on Stanley's life as he navigated his way through it.

The life story approach has been used within criminological research to explain trajectories of desistance and criminality amongst groups of juvenile delinquents (Laub and Sampson, 2005). The life course perspective is a broad theoretical perspective which uses longitudinal data to explain the factors that can play a role in influencing involvement in crime at different age stages in the life course (Laub, 2003; Laub and Sampson, 2005). The life course is divided into childhood, adolescence and adulthood; the life course model draws on a range of criminological perspectives to explain involvement in crime at these different age stages. Laub and Sampson's research suggested that crime was likely to occur when an individual's bonds to society are weak (Laub and Sampson, 1993). They identified parental style and attachment to parents as important in childhood; school attachment and peers as important in adolescence; and marriage, military service and employment as important in adulthood as factors that influenced an individual's bond to society.

Life course research placed particular emphasis on experiences in early childhood that have an influence on adverse outcomes later on in life. It focuses on 'cumulative disadvantage' whereby delinquency and anti-social behaviour was linked to adverse social experiences in adulthood. Although this research focused on individual experiences it saw crime as linked to experiences of structural disadvantage. Risk factor research in criminology builds on this approach and identifies early childhood risk factors that can increase involvement in crime (Farrington, 2003; Farrington and Loeber, 2012). These risk factors focus on individual characteristics such as aggression, risk taking or low attention, family deficits such as being from a single parent family or high conflict family, school performance, peer relationships and socioeconomic factors such as low family income as some of the factors that can lead to involvement in crime.

Single life stories have also been used to unpick the social factors that lead to criminality along with looking at the impact that involvement with criminal justice has on future criminality and social connection (Shaw 1966). The life story approach helps in outlining the influence and importance of human agency in making sense of the social and in orientating behaviour and making choices (Laub and Sampson 2005). Gelsthorpe (2007) suggests that life stories are a way of connecting the individual to the social and a way of bringing the 'social' back into social science which is becoming preoccupied with the scientific endeavour.

An important element of the life story interview is that the interview is unstructured or semi-structured. The interviewer does not impose any set of themes, terms or language to the interview through questions, thereby allowing the interviewee or informant to recount life events in his own 'spontaneous language' (Bauer, 1996). Such an approach allows the participant to tell their stories in their own words and on their own terms (Bauer, 1996; Kakuru and Paradza, 2013). It also allows for an intersectional understanding of social identity formation, in which no social category or construct is super imposed on the participants through which to make sense of their own lives, thereby allowing for an outlining of the complex mechanisms and competing influences on an individual through which their identity and life develops (Rustin 2000).

Life stories are commonly used in research with vulnerable groups as it is seen as empowering and humanising way of conducting research (Wuthnow, 2011; Kakuru and Paradza, 2013). A life story approach allows for counter narratives to be constructed which provide alternative definitions and meanings and may challenge 'master narratives' or dominant cultural expressions (Andrews, 2002). This aspect of the life story has been particularly relevant in feminist research and race studies, where life story methods were adopted to make the 'invisible' visible through the collecting of biographies and autobiographies in order to bring attention to collective structural oppression (Harrison 2008).

By focusing on narrative, life stories are a method of collecting history and culture as 'lived experience' (Wuthnow 2011; see also Rustin 2000). The biographical method relies on the 'thick descriptions' and detailed accounts of individual lives (similar to ethnographic accounts of particular cases developed by Clifford Geertz and Paul Willis) as the means

through which sociological theory is developed and constructed. Life story research is useful in getting rich, in-depth information from a small group of participants. The key strength of this method lies in the importance it attaches to understanding the developments and changes in a single life story as a way to tap into the ‘processual aspects of social life’ (Bryman 2008; 440).

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis

3.21. Access

Desmond (2014) argues that gaining access is often the most difficult part of fieldwork. This was certainly the case in this research project, as access was the most time consuming and challenging part. Highlighting some of the challenges of gaining access outlines some of the limitations as well as the advantages of the final sample drawn for the research.

I first devised the study as a prison ethnography which would be based in two prisons in England. This plan had to be abandoned as the prison service refused my application for research access on the grounds that a similar project by a team lead by Professor Alison Lieblich had already been approved, and that it would require too many staff resources to supervise me in prison or give me key training. The next option that seemed feasible was to work with ex-prisoners. The research design had always prioritised understanding religious identity after release from prison. This would have proved tricky with a prison study as it would have meant choosing prisoners who were due to be released within a few months of the first interview. I would then have collected contact details from these offenders and conducted a follow up interview after release from prison. This approach had several drawbacks which were recognised in the original plan; the most important would have been a high rate of drop out: offenders can be hard to reach after their release as they tend not to want to keep in touch with people they know from prison. With these limitations in view, working with ex-prisoners was an easier way of getting a complete picture of their practise of faith over the course of their lives.

With this new research objective of working with ex-prisoners, the first stage of gaining research access involved collecting a list of organisations that were working with Muslim ex-

prisoners. A whole host of organisations (see Appendix A for a complete list) was contacted to help recruit participants. If an organisation agreed to help put me in touch with their service users, I would pass them the demographic groups I was interested in accessing. I was keen to get diverse ethnic backgrounds, which would include both born-Muslims and converts, as well as a range of age groups. The organisations usually contacted relevant participants and asked them if they would like to be part of the research. If the ex-prisoners agreed, the organisation would either put the participant directly in touch with me or would set up a time and place for the interview.

The most obvious organisation that could help with recruiting participants was the probation service. I contacted the London Probation Trust (LPT) and was advised to apply formally for access through the centralised National Offender Management Service (NOMS) system. The research officer at the probation trust offered to look over my research proposal and also got another member of staff to comment on it so that I could incorporate their comments before putting in a formal research application. Their main concern was the extent of the role the probation service would be required to play in helping me with access. With the input of the research officers at the LPT, I modified the research design to address their concerns. The final proposal was submitted through the Integrated Research Application System (IRAS) at the National Offender Management Service head office. The head office checked the application and passed it back to the London Probation Trust with their comments. There was another exchange of comments. The main concern raised by the Research Officer at the London Probation Trust this time was that my gender may mean that Muslim men would refuse to engage with me. The Research Officer's concerns were allayed when I pointed out that recent research projects which had looked at issues of religious identity in prison in England and Wales were led by female researchers (Arnold, & Straub, 2011; Phillips, 2012; Spalek & El-Hassan, 2007). Once all the concerns were adequately addressed, I had permission to contact the probation trusts in all the boroughs of Greater London.

I identified boroughs¹² (Appendix A) which would have a good mix of different ethnicities and got in touch with their Senior Officers. Although I had permission from the LPT head office, individual boroughs were reluctant to help with the project. The probation service was

¹² Based on census data.

<https://files.datapress.com/london/dataset/2011-census-diversity/2011-census-diversity-in-london.pdf>

going through a major transition as the service was being split into the Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) and the National Probation Service (NPS). This meant that Probation Officer's (PO) caseloads were being reassigned and POs were dealing with the changes that the split in service would mean for service delivery. I visited several boroughs and passed on details of my research to all the POs working in those offices. A small number (three) of referrals were received through the probation service. Interviews with these participants were carried out at the probation office.

A significant part of my sample was drawn from a mosque in a small city in the North of England. The mosque was chosen as I knew of other researchers who had accessed research participants from this mosque, which was part of a larger network of Sufi mosques across England that follow the Naqshbandi tradition in Islam. A key contact at the mosque found members of the mosque community that were suitable and willing to participate in the research. The participants were recruited for me; it was not clear if any refused or might have been excluded for any reason by my contact at the mosque. The community in which the mosque was based was predominantly first and second-generation British Pakistani migrants who had migrated to England in the early 1960s and 1970s. The sample drawn from the mosque therefore was mainly of British Pakistan ethnicity. There were however two white converts in the sample. Although the mosque was chosen purely for convenience, its location in the North of England and its particular adherence to Naqshbandi Islam provided a contrast to the rest of the participants who were from London (even though Sunni-Muslims tended not to adhere to any particular tradition within Sunni Islam). These differences in identity on the basis of geographical location, ethnicity and religious affiliation will be examined in detail in the empirical chapters.

Participants were also recruited through two third-sector organisations working with offenders. One of the organisations asked me to take notes during their meetings with the incentive that they would help with recruitment, but then did not follow up. I did however end up making further contacts with other organisations at this meeting, and these contacts were more helpful in arranging access. One of the organisations I contacted was helping young offenders with problems encountered during resettlement and they agreed to put me in touch with the young offenders they were helping. This organisation was keen to facilitate research and I was able to access young offenders from a range of ethnic backgrounds, however this had positive and negative outcomes.

During fieldwork, I discovered that the organisation had been putting multiple researchers in touch with their users. This meant that the participants were suffering from research fatigue and were suspicious about the level of attention they were drawing. It was much harder to build rapport with these participants. They did not understand the unstructured nature of the first interview, perhaps because of their previous experience of other research, and wanted a set of questions. One of them gave me advice on how I could improve my interview technique by asking more direct questions. The unstructured nature of the study which focused on their personal experiences from a young age was perhaps too intrusive for these respondents. Interviews with this group of participants were conducted at the third sector organisations office (five interviews), a café (two interviews) and at my university, the London School of Economics and Political Science, LSE (three interviews).

3.22. Sampling

Choosing cases for detailed studies, as required in life story research, involves a cross-case comparison. Researchers need to carefully consider demographic and other characteristics that need to be included in the study. I therefore paid particular attention to collecting in-depth information from a purposive sample that had the characteristics which would allow for a diverse cross-case comparison while still maintaining the depth of detail and richness of engagement that a case study method¹³ allows for. The research sample was drawn from a number of sources (see Appendix A for a complete list of organisations); this diversity of sources allowed engagement with a wide range of Muslim offenders from different age groups and ethnic backgrounds, who were living in different neighbourhoods across England. The research paid particular attention to the interlacing of race and religious identity. As discussed earlier, the HMIP (2010) report on Muslims in UK prisons suggests that religion and ethnicity combine to create different levels of alienation. Looking at the religious identity of Muslim prisoners from different ethnic groups allowed for the impact and significance of different aspects of an individual's social identity to be fully explored. It was important to include a range of age groups as research focusing on a particular age group can suffer from cohort effect (Bryman 2008; 440).

¹³ I used life story interviews to develop case studies and use the terms interchangeably.

The nature of interaction with the participant and the demographic characteristics of participants varied based on the organisation that they were drawn from (more on this in the section on access and reflexivity). The purposive sampling prioritised getting a good mix based on the following characteristics: Muslim offenders from different ethnic backgrounds, a good mix of born Muslims and converts and offenders from all age groups.

Sampling criterion: The final sample included the following:

This research involved multiple interviews with each participant (see Appendix B for number and duration of interviews with each participant). This can lead to potential concern if participants decide to disengage from the research and is a common drawback in any longitudinal study which aims to study participants at different points in their lives (Bryman, 2008). My research started with a large sample of 21 individuals. The four participants listed in bold in Appendix B were excluded from the research as the interviews with them were too short in duration and inconsistent (discussed later in this chapter). As outlined earlier, life story research can be based on the in-depth study of just one individual (Shaw, 1966). Each participant of this research therefore, can be regarded as an individual life story or case study. Even though some of the participants were not interested in seriously engaging with the research, it was still possible to draw meaningful research output from the remaining sample. Out of the original sample of twenty-one respondents, seventeen were included in the data analysis.

The small sample used for this research limits the generalisability of the research findings to a wider context. This is a common limitation in qualitative research which prioritises the richness of detail and depth of research output over concerns of representativeness and generalisability. The value of qualitative research lies in its naturalistic engagement with research participants. This allows qualitative research to emphasise the uniqueness of individual cases along with outlining the typical aspects of different social situations and contexts. This makes qualitative research output generalizable to other cases that share the unique characteristics of the particular case or the typical aspects of the social context. Through purposive sampling, the research has attempted to provide in-depth and detailed information about the practise and meaning of faith to ex-offenders from different ethnicities, age groups and neighbourhoods. The sample also included converts and born Muslims. These detailed studies can be used to make theoretical generalisations to groups who share the characteristics included in the different case studies developed.

3.23. *Qualitative Interviews*

As part of the process of explaining the research and getting written consent, participants were made aware that participation in the research would involve more than one interview. The first interview was used to build rapport with the research participants. Following a Biographical Interpretive Method (BIM in Harrison 2009), the first interview with each of the participants was unstructured. Participants were asked to talk about their lives, thinking about it in chapters. The interview was kept unstructured so that no assumptions or preconceptions were imposed on the interviewees. In particular, I was conscious not to over emphasise religion as the primary category of interest for the research. Desmond (2014) suggests that “[b]y assigning utmost importance to the categories that define a group, ethnographers may unintentionally bias their informants to filter the representation of everyday life through the prism of that category.”

Research examining identity formation can over emphasise the importance of one aspect of the person’s identity over other equally significant aspects. The research placed emphasis on religion only in the selection of research participants: it drew its sample from a group of Muslim offenders. Following this however, the interviews followed the protocols of the life story method without a specific focus on religion. The research developed themes outlined by Atkinson (in Bryman 2008) which included categories such as birth and family origins, cultural settings and traditions, social factors and education (a more comprehensive list in the coding section). These themes do not directly focus on religion. Furthermore, this research emphasised the importance of allowing the participants control over defining what they consider significant in the telling of their life story. Such an approach ensured that participants were given the flexibility to explain their identity in their own terms. The research did follow up on prompts that were considered important for the research questions in the subsequent interviews.

The first interview rarely followed any kind of chronological order, and participants chose different events from their lives that they considered significant. They went backwards and forward as they discussed significant chapters and important events in their lives. Asking participants to structure their lives in chapters immediately drew attention to significant

events which brought about changes in the lives of the individuals. Significant events in the individuals' lives included experiences of parental divorce, exclusion from school, death or loss of a significant friend or relative, first interaction with social services and the criminal justice system, arrest, incarceration, change of friendship group, moving home, homelessness and release from prison. In organising their lives in chapters, the participants reflected on the impact of these significant events on their lives and the changes it brought about in them and their surrounding environment.

The first interview was followed up with further interviews that were more structured, in which themes and ideas that emerged in the first interview were followed up in more detail. The second interview also included some questions that were considered relevant to the research questions. In follow-up interviews, I also used timelines with participants (as recommended by Laub and Sampson 2004). I usually started follow-up interviews by asking participants to help me organise in chronological order the different parts of their lives they had told me about in the first interview. As mentioned earlier, in the first interview, participants were moving forward and backwards through their lives, talking about events they considered significant. When talking about an event or aspect of their lives, they would start recounting other events or periods which they felt were linked to the point they were explaining. The time lines were useful as they provided structure to the stories and participants could chronologically order the information they had given in the first interview. The time line also allowed me to go back and revisit significant themes that required further explanation or detail at different stages in their life. Going over the significant events in each participant's life in a chronological order also allowed for resolution of any inconsistencies or ambiguities. The interviews were recorded with the respondents' permission. They were then verbatim transcribed through the help of research assistants. I went through the transcripts to fill in gaps left by the transcribers. The transcripts of the interviews were put onto NVivo for coding.

3.24. Data analysis and Coding

The first part of data organisation involved formatting and editing interview transcripts. Initial precoding of the data was done manually, in which key passages and quotes were organised in a word document. This document maintained the chronological order of the life

story stages, but divided these stages into major themes that seemed significant upon the first reading of the data. This was followed by a write up on each of the participants, in which themes relevant to the research questions, such as significant events, neighbourhood, motifs, emotions and relationships were noted in individual biographies. This helped bring each of the stories together so that major events and themes in each story were available in a summarised format for easy access. The interview transcripts, biographical information, field notes and relevant literature were then transferred to NVivo for formal analysis.

Saldana (2015) describes coding as the “critical link” between data collection and their explanation of meaning’ (3). Coding entails capturing the ‘essence’ or main attribute of language-based qualitative data. As stated in the previous section, the research adopted unstructured interviewing. Starting from early childhood, participants were allowed to recollect events and chapters in their lives that they considered relevant and important. Coding analysis has been broken down to reflect the different chapters in the lives of participants, as presented by them during the interviews. Most participants divided their lives according to age. The first significant chapter is up to the age of ten or eleven, the next significant chapter is teenage years, followed by life after secondary school, moving onto early adulthood, then their current situation. The flow of these seamless narratives is broken at various points due to traumatic events, losses suffered, imprisonment, and other sudden changes in their lives. The coding aimed to retain the narrative element of the interviews while also highlighting these sudden changes and significant events.

NVivo coding was the first step through which the data were clustered or organised. Recurring meanings and patterns were developed into categories. These categories formed the basis of major research themes which were used to develop theories from the data. The research adopted social organisation categories by Lofland, et al (in Saladana, 2015), which include the following:

- 1- Cultural practices (daily routines, occupational tasks, micro cultural activity etc.)
- 2- Episodes (unanticipated events or irregular activities e.g. divorce)
- 3- Encounters (interactions between two or more individuals)
- 4- Roles (student, father, etc.)
- 5- Social and personal relationships
- 6- Groups and cliques (gangs, congregations, families)
- 7- Organisations (schools, prisons, probation)

- 8- Settlements and habitats
- 9- Subcultures and lifestyles

These categories were used to code the data in order to examine the different experiences within these different social settings.

3.25. Reflexivity

Reflexive accounts of research in criminology are not as well-developed when compared to anthropology and sociology, although recent research has tried to address this concern by making the emotions, experiences and demographic backgrounds of the researcher part of the research analysis (Phillips and Earle, 2010; Jewkes, 2012). Recent controversy surrounding Alice Goffman's ethnographic study of young black men in an inner city neighbourhood in Philadelphia has reignited some of the debates surrounding in-field reflexivity and the 'messiness' associated with ethnographic or in-depth qualitative research (A. Goffman, 2014). Goffman's (2014) research has, on the one hand, been lauded as a classic piece of ethnography, receiving the American Sociological Association Dissertation Award 2011; it has also been heavily criticised for her methodological approach and lack of reflexive examination of the privileges and impact of her own positionality (Buford and Reuben, 2014). This controversy brings to light a lot of the dilemmas facing qualitative researchers, such as researcher subjectivity and the importance of reflexive self-examination at all stages of the research process.

Initial debate surrounding the importance of insider and outsider status in sociological and anthropological research focused on the advantages and disadvantages associated with the researcher sharing some of the social characteristics of the research participants (Merriam et al., 2001). Phillips and Earle (2010) suggest that such discussions around insider and outsider status are firmly rooted within a positivist epistemology which makes arguments and counter arguments about which of these positions is better suited to uncover externally 'true' or 'authentic' knowledge. Recent research has discussed how being an outsider or insider in the research process is a precarious and complex process with no clear boundaries between the two positions (Merriam et al., 2001). The significance of the researcher's biography and identity in life story research is highlighted by Gelsthorpe (2007) in her examination of the intertwined biography of Clifford Shaw in the telling of 'Stanley's' life story in *The Jack*

Roller. The life story method acknowledges that the life story elicited through such an approach is a particular telling of the tale for a set purpose, at a specific point in time, in a particular context to an individual researcher (Kakuru & Paradza, 2013). Understanding these influences is therefore an important aspect of the life story approach.

Social researchers argue that the value of reflexivity lies in making explicit the impact of the researcher's own biography, ethnicity and gender on the research experience and subsequent data analysis (Alexander, 2000; Quraishi, 2008; Phillips and Earle, 2010). Furthermore, they suggest that reflexive reflection on the researcher's own biography, ethnicity and gender is a way of breaking down the barrier between the researcher and the researched, and can help mitigate the 'othering' which is a part of the experience of individuals who experience criminal justice sanctions, particularly imprisonment. This research follows in this tradition. It starts by outlining some of the feelings and anxieties of the researcher at the start of the project. It then moves on to consider how the researcher's own biography, gender, religion and ethnicity affected gaining access in the different research sites that were outlined earlier. This is followed by a discussion around the interview process and points of engagement and difference that emerged with some of the participants.

In ethnography and research there are anxieties associated with entering the field (Alexander, 2000; Phillips & Earle, 2010; Quraishi, 2008). Previous researchers' anxieties resonated with my own apprehensions about starting fieldwork. Alexander (2000) describes how, prior to her fieldwork, she witnessed research participants 'play' another novice researcher by feeding her outlandish stories about racism which the novice researcher took at face value. This caused Alexander to develop concerns about becoming a 'dupe' during her research with Asian 'gangs'. This was a concern that I shared, as I did not have any experience of living in inner city neighbourhoods. Knowledge about street code and street culture was something I discovered through the participants. I therefore felt it was important to have a mechanism for checking the information provided to me by participants. Having multiple interviews with each of the participants allowed me the time to go through previous research data so that inconsistencies could be followed up and clarified with each of the participants. Similarity of descriptions and themes across participants was another way to develop a deeper understanding of their experiences.

Quraishi (2008) had concerns that participants of his research would become wary in the post 9/11 scenario, viewing him as a sort of 'native informant'. These concerns also resonated with my own apprehensions about having difficulty in developing rapport and gaining participants' trust. On the whole during fieldwork this was not a particular issue; it was not till the last set of participants that I encountered suspicion and mistrust from participants about the reasons for my research. My final set of interviews was organised through a third sector organisation helping young offenders with resettlement concerns they encountered upon release from prison. This last set of interviews challenged all the assumptions and fieldwork thinking I had acquired in the field.

In my previous interviews I found that participants were happy to start off with more factual information as they considered how to talk about the more intangible things such as their emotions, feelings and significant events in their lives. Information about which neighbourhood they grew up in, the schools they went to, siblings and family structure, crime committed, sentence served and the prisons they went to were relatively easy questions for them to answer and gave them time to think about other things. In my final set of interviews with the young offenders, I struggled to get through even these basic questions. Any attempt to get the young offenders at this third sector organisation to talk about their experience of prison or even their life was met with a lot of resistance and push back. The young offenders were particularly worried about how the research output could be used to track or identify them. They felt that giving factual information about themselves, for example the prisons they had been in and where they grew up, would make it easier for conversations to be traced back to them. One of the participants was quite upset that I was asking questions about his ethnicity: he felt this was irrelevant to the research which was on Muslims. A chance remark about my having visited a prison as a student researcher, which usually would become a point to start a conversation around prison, was also met with immediate resistance and suspicion. This last group of participants I recruited were younger in age and had come out of prison very recently; some of them had only come out a few weeks prior to the interview. Both their age and the fact that they had recently been released, I think, made them feel vulnerable about the purpose of the research and how the output could in some way be used against them.

In the interviews that I had with this group of participants, the sense of chaos in their lives was the most outstanding motif; this was present in their concern around securing permanent housing, managing family relationships and friendship circles, and planning for their future.

It seemed that for these participants, managing and presenting a coherent identity in an interview with a researcher was almost too much of an effort on top of all these real and pressing concerns. This was evident in the glaring inconsistencies in the stories that this set of participants shared. For example, one young offender told me he was born in South Africa and had lived there till the age of 12; when I asked him which city he lived in, he said he could not remember. Another participant said he had a six-month-old son; this did not fit in with the rest of his story as he said he had been released from prison three months ago after serving an 18-month sentence. This group's reaction to my research was surprising and completely different from the rest of the research experience. The length of the interviews was also much shorter: one of the interviews was only 17 minutes long. From this group of seven young offenders, I only included data from interviews of four respondents. These interviews were longer and the rapport with participants was stronger. These interviews have been used as the young adult offenders' identities and challenges were very different to the majority of the research participants who were in their mid-thirties or older.

It was not possible to conduct follow up interviews with any of the participants from this group. The third sector organisation through which the participants were recruited provided Muslim offenders with housing, however quite a lot of the participants were evicted during the research process. Participants also kept changing mobile phone numbers making it difficult to contact them without the help of the organisation. This last set of interviews, though challenging and frustrating, reinforced my confidence about the rest of my data and fieldwork experience where I did not struggle to develop trust and rapport. It does, however, highlight the limitations in accessing and building trust with vulnerable and stigmatised groups.

Recent research has looked at the presentation of the researcher in terms of the embodied self, represented through the dress and demeanour of the researcher and the impact of these on the research process and information that is acquired (for a full discussion see Zubair, Martin, & Victor, 2012). Prior to starting research, I spent some time considering how I would dress for the research. As Quraishi (2008) notes, dress can be an important signifier of identity. Zubair, the primary researcher conducting research with Muslims in Birmingham found that conforming to participants' expectations of culturally appropriate behaviour and form of dressing helped her acquire insider status within the Asian community where she was conducting her research (Zubair, Martin & Victor 2012). She found that in order to maintain

this insider status she had to change her style of dressing depending on the characteristics of the family she was interviewing. While interviewing more liberal, younger age group Muslims, she wore western clothes and no hijab, while with more conservative Muslims she wore a hijab and Pakistani clothes. Despite all these changes to conform to the expectation of her participants, she found that participants would still comment and advise her on how to dress appropriately. After careful consideration of these fieldwork insights, I usually wore loose fitting clothes covering all of my body. I also wore a scarf around my neck. On my trips up North to the mosque, I usually wore Pakistani clothes as a majority of the women in that community wore such clothes. I decided not to cover my head. Wearing a hijab in order to fit in with the social expectations of the participants of my research seemed a form of deception and I did not feel comfortable altering my identity for the purposes of the research. In retrospect, I think I made the right decision. My being honest about my practise of religion prompted participants to have more frank discussions about the parts of faith that were important to them and the ones they tended to ignore. Participants also shared experiences of drinking, drugs, sexual relationships and clubbing (things considered taboo in strict religious groups) that they may not have discussed with a researcher they considered strongly religious.

Recent research within criminology suggests that there is a need for criminological researchers who are able to grasp and understand Islamic jurisprudence and culture (Quraishi, 2008). Quraishi (2008) outlines the advantages of having insider status as a Muslim in his fieldwork in three English prisons. He suggests that because he shared the ethnicity and religion of his respondents, he experienced first-hand some of the concerns and issues raised by his respondents in their interviews. This suggests that sharing the religion of research participants can be invaluable in the field, both in helping build rapport but also in being able to engage more fully with some of the issues raised by the participants. As a British Pakistani Muslim, I had a religious upbringing and learnt the teachings and practises of Islam – such as reading the Quran in Arabic, prayer and fasting – as a child. I therefore had the advantage of having insider knowledge of Muslim religious practises and belief systems. For non-Muslim researchers these can often be hard to comprehend (Quraishi, 2008).

It is also important to note that although I was raised as a Muslim, my practise of religious rituals is sporadic and almost non-existent. I however still affiliate with Islam and see myself as a secular Muslim. This allowed me the benefit of insider status through a shared affiliation

and understanding of Islam but also allowed for a degree of distance in analysing and assessing field data. This 'insider'-outsider duality was particularly useful for this research as the Muslim participants I interviewed had very different and varying practises of Islam. My knowledge of Islam made me sensitive to the differences between the participants and since I did not have a particular bias towards any one sect and way of being religious, I could appreciate the differing practices and importance of religion in this diverse group.

The majority of the participants I recruited from the mosque in the North of England were second generation British Pakistani Muslims. Their practise of religion was similar to a lot of people in Pakistan, so I was aware of the traditions and festivals that were important to them. For example, one of my visits coincided with the Muslim month of Rabi-ul-awal, this is the month of the birth of the prophet Mohammad and the community had a full month of different festive activities planned as a form of celebration. My awareness of the significance of this cultural festival put the participants at ease, and they were able to openly discuss their practise of faith. Several of the participants confessed that they kept parts of their Sufi practises of Islam hidden from other Muslims who did not share their beliefs, as these practises were regarded as being inauthentic 'bidahs' or innovations in religion by some Muslims sects (particularly Wahabi or Salafi Muslims). With converts, my status as a born Muslim was useful in starting a discussion around a host of issues such as: differences between their perceptions of Islam prior to conversion and the realities of life for them as converts within Muslim communities; and differences between their practise of faith and the practises of born Muslims (I discuss these differences in more detail in chapters four to seven).

As previously mentioned, I was born and grew up in Pakistan and so have an understanding and experience of South Asian culture and life. This became particularly important with South Asian Muslims, as we shared common languages and cultural knowledge. Sharing a common language with some of the research participants was a strong advantage in the field, as language is regarded as a strong carrier of culture and identity. Being a British Pakistani myself, I was, for example, aware of the 'biraderi' or caste differences which were quite important within this community. The participants described their own position within the community on the basis of these castes and I was able to understand the meaning of these positionalities within the community.

Along with having points of similarity with the South Asian participants, there were points of difference as well. The strong urban-rural divide in Pakistan meant that there were points of cultural difference between my experience of Pakistan as an urban middle-class Pakistani and the participants who hailed predominantly from rural farming populations. A majority of South Asian participants had immigrated with a large kinship community from their village in Pakistan. My immigration experience was different as I did not have a similar kinship community in England. Prior to my research, I had lived in several cities in the UK and therefore had experience of living within British Pakistani communities in the UK. My experience of British Pakistanis and of life in the UK is predominantly that of middle class suburban life. This was very different from the British Pakistani community that I drew participants from in the North of England. The community there was much tighter knit with strong familial and friendship ties going back several generations; it was also more insular with less interaction with other ethnic or religious communities. My experience of life in Britain was closer to that of some of the participants I interviewed through the London Probation Trust: these participants were more likely to be part of more multi-ethnic neighbourhoods with friends and networks that were much more religiously and ethnically diverse.

As a first-generation migrant to the UK, I have experience and understanding of belonging to and navigating two different nationalities and cultures. This again was a point of similarity between me and the participants who were mostly from minority ethnic groups and were first or second-generation immigrants. Although I was educated in English, my first language is Urdu; therefore I was able to relate to some of the difficulties experienced by them or their parents as new migrants whose first language was not English. I migrated to the UK as a student and stayed on as the spouse of a medical doctor. These experiences of migration through education and as the wife of a professional doctor meant that there were differences between my experience of migration and those of the participants, as a lot of them faced extreme economic and social displacement and hardship. There were also differences in educational attainment, as levels of educational attainment tended to be very low amongst the participants.

Another point of empathy and engagement with the participants was my status as a single mother. I found myself deeply affected by the impact of parental divorce and the subsequent hardship and flux that a lot of the participants described. Their experiences of loss of contact

with one parent, difficulties of having too much or too little parental supervision and financial hardship were all dilemmas I had navigated with my children. Their stories therefore struck a chord with me. Furthermore, a majority of the participants also had children and discussions around parenting were a useful way of breaking the ice and developing rapport.

Ethnographic fieldwork in the prison setting has discussed the challenges and advantages of being a female researcher in an all-male prison. In the all-male prison environment, interactions with any females are in short supply. Therefore, female ethnographic researchers working in this context find it relatively easy to recruit participants for research. Similar to the experience of other female researchers, I found it relatively easy to engage with and develop rapport with the participants in my research. There can however be challenges. Claire Alexander (2000) outlines how her gender, ethnicity and age became a source of curiosity and discussion within the youth club in which she carried out her research on Asian gangs. This was similar to my experience in the mosque and the resettlement organisation. In both places, all the participants knew each other and there were discussions and curiosity about who was being interviewed and the purpose of the research. The fact that I was allowed to break the gender segregation in order to conduct interviews with the participants in a part of the mosque where usually only women were allowed was another aspect of the research which stirred the interest of a lot of the mosque attendees. A long one-on-one conversation with a woman who was not a close relative was something unusual for this group. The interaction made some of them reflect on their relationships with the significant women in their lives.

Immad, for example, described how his wife worked in the mornings as a sales assistant and was doing a post-graduate degree in the evenings, while Immad stayed home to look after their daughter. Although he was enjoying this arrangement, there were concerns from his mother and sisters about how it was not appropriate for a man to have to change his daughter's nappies: it was perceived as a challenge to his masculinity. Immad was able to manage his role as a stay-home dad only because he would take his daughter over to his mother or sister's house every time she needed a diaper change. I do not think Immad would have shared this aspect of his life with a male researcher. Rahim, who had just offered to make me a cup of tea, said 'You know, I've never offered to make a cup of tea for my wife: I should do that.' With Abdullah, things got tense at times, as he spent a large amount of time during all his interviews talking about the women from his community he had come across in

nightclubs during his time as a security guard. He described them as ‘slags’ and ‘bitches’. He was also curious about my opinion on this, and whether I had experience of night life growing up in England. Considering that we shared a common ethnic background and religion, I was sure he was trying to put me in his category of either ‘slag’ or the women he approved of – the ones who did not challenge community conventions. I avoided such questions by saying I grew up in Pakistan, but Abdullah was not completely satisfied and continued to make attempts to figure out which category to put me in. Although I found his opinions as he stated them problematic, he was tempering his judgement of these women to present himself as non-judgemental.

In this section, I have outlined some of my characteristics as the researcher, and the impact of these on data collection and analysis. Discussing these characteristics and their potential impact on field experience is significant as it allows for a more nuanced understanding of insider-outsider status in the research setting. The location of the interview also had an impact on the data from the interviews. The interviews in the probation office, for example, were shorter and much more formal. Building rapport took more time. Participants were happy to discuss their offending and time in prison, but were more reluctant to talk about their life on the outside, particularly their families. For these participants, their time in prison was fresher compared to some of the participants I got through the mosque. They were still navigating their relationship with the criminal justice system through their interactions with the probation service and the restrictions of their license still limited their lives in different ways. Their lives were still divided to the time till the end of their license and then their life after that. By the second interview, participants at the probation office were more relaxed and conversation flowed more easily. They were also more open to discussing family networks and relationships.

Interview quality was impacted if participants felt they could be overheard. This became an issue with some of the interviews conducted at the mosque. Since I had to travel a long distance to get to the mosque, my contact was keen to group participants so that I could conduct back-to-back interviews. At one fieldwork visit, he had assembled 5 to 6 participants and had them waiting in a room which was adjacent to the interview room. The voices from both the rooms were crossing over, which made some of the participants anxious about what they could say. The interviews became rushed and short. With some of the participants I was able to have more detailed follow up interviews and managed to develop rapport.

The interviews conducted in a café and at LSE were the most informal and relaxed. I was able to provide tea and small snacks for the participants and the interviews were more like a conversation. These interviews were also the longest: usually around two to three hours. I have already detailed the problems I faced with participants at the third sector organisation; those problems had less to do with the physical location of the interview and more to do with ‘research fatigue’ as outlined earlier.

3.26. Ethical considerations and risk

Since all of my interviews were going to be with offenders outside prison, I had to ensure that the location of the interviews was safe for me and comfortable for the participants. I minimised risk by conducting all the interviews in public places. I used many different locations for the interviews: a mosque, the Probation Trust interview rooms, a cafe, a room in a resettlement organisation, and my university. For interviews conducted outside the probation office, I ensured that there were emergency contacts that had information about the location and expected duration of the meetings. I logged in the start and finish of each interview with a reliable contact.

Along with the physical risks, I also had to consider the emotional impact of my research. The life stories that the research participants shared had difficult and painful aspects which were at times emotionally difficult for me to deal with. I found regular de-briefing sessions with my supervisors helped to mitigate this stress. My supervisor agreed to be available at short notice via phone and through in-person meetings or emails in case I needed to discuss anything, and I never had a problem getting help when required. I also took small breaks in which I completely stepped away from my data and project; this helped me develop some distance and clarity.

Any research involving human participants has to abide by ethical standards of research practise. The research was conducted in accordance with the procedures set out in the British Sociological Association and LSE’s ethical guidelines (See Appendices for details). The proposed topic obviously involved gathering data of a sensitive nature, therefore the research was conducted within strict ethical parameters. Protecting the confidentiality of all

participants was imperative for this research and all interview data was maintained in an anonymized format in order to protect the confidentiality and identity of research participants. Personal details of the participants were removed from all interview transcripts and were stored in a separate password protected document to ensure that research participants are not identifiable from research output. Interview transcripts and personal data were kept and used in accordance with the Data Protection Act. Interview data were stored on my computer hard drive which is password protected. The research abided by NOMS rules for research, and participants were made aware of the limits of confidentiality in this regard¹⁴. Participants made references to crimes that they committed in the past for which they were not convicted. They were careful not to share details about these past events but did refer to it in their interviews.

Participation in this research was completely voluntary and relied heavily on rapport between the researcher and participant. Participants were informed that participation in the research was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the research at any time. I provided a brief outline of the research and a written consent form. Keeping in mind the low literacy levels amongst offenders, I read out the consent form to the participants. They also had the opportunity to read the consent form before they signed it. Interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants and full consent was sought about their involvement in the research process. Participants were encouraged to ask questions about the research and any queries they had were addressed as and when they occurred throughout the interview. The first interview was unstructured; this allowed participants to choose what they wished to speak about and to voice their own opinion about their experiences.

An oral life story methodology involves the recollection of views, memories, attitudes and life experiences which can induce an emotional response in the participants. As a researcher, I was aware that this recollection could lead to psychological stress for the participants. There were times when the participants were emotionally upset and even cried during the

¹⁴ The researcher is obliged to inform the probation staff about the content of interviews if the participant tells the researcher about:

- Behaviour that is against probation rules and can be adjudicated against;
- Undisclosed illegal acts;
- Behaviour that is harmful to the participant (e.g. self-harm or suicide) or others.
- Any security risks.

interviews. At such times I let the participant know that they could stop the interview or move on to another subject. We occasionally took breaks in which the participants had a drink of water and collected themselves before resuming the interview. There was never a situation in which I felt the distress warranted a serious level of concern. As I do not have any formal counselling or mentoring training, I kept contact details of organisations, (such as the Muslim Youth Helpline and the Good Samaritans) that could have helped the participants if I felt the situation was beyond my skill. The situation never arose. In part, this was due to the fact that most of the participants had plans of meeting up with friends or family after interviews and a lot of the interviews, especially ones that were over an hour long, would be interrupted with phone calls from people they had agreed to meet. I therefore knew that they had support available after the interview. It was also reassuring when participants mentioned in subsequent interviews that telling their stories had helped them get perspective or had been cathartic for them.

3.27. Case studies

I used the interviews to develop case studies of each of the participants. These case studies focused on the uses of religion by each respondent at different stages in the life course. I also focused on other significant factors that had an influence on identity. In this section I briefly outline the key events in the lives of each research respondent. These can act as an introduction to the participants and give a short overview of their individual narratives.

Ammar, 44, Black Caribbean, Salafi (convert), conviction for armed robbery, longest prison term: 8 years.

| Childhood | Adolescence | Prison | After prison |
|--|---|--|---|
| Parental divorce, abusive father, arrest at the age of eight, in and out of care, spent time in secure youth hostels, excluded from school. Christian, Church of England. Attended a Pentecostal church | Became involved in drug dealing and burglaries from a young age. Had progressed to armed robberies and served several prison sentences. | First prison sentence at the age of fifteen. Converted to Islam in prison at the age of nineteen. Moved away from religion upon release. Used prison to build contacts and increase involvement in crime. Served several long sentences. Converted | Set up his own company to provide help to offenders looking to desist. New identity was wounded healer. Had desisted from crime. Strong involvement in religious community. |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| | | <p>to Islam in prison at the age of twenty-eight through the influence of his Muslim girlfriend. Remained involved in crime. Last sentence was at age 30.</p> <p>Birth of daughter became turning point for change.</p> <p>Trained as a mentor in prison and completed a law degree.</p> | |
|--|--|--|--|

Abdullah, 44, British Pakistani, Sufi-Muslim, conviction for drug dealer, longest prison term: 2 years.

| Childhood | Adolescence | Prison | After prison |
|--|---|--|---|
| <p>Distant relationship with father.</p> <p>Strong involvement in mosque.</p> <p>Kinship community important</p> | <p>Became involved in crime through his work as a security guard in a nightclub.</p> <p>Did not see religion as important but maintained relationships in his kinship community.</p> <p>Got married but continued with involvement in drug dealing.</p> | <p>Two years for drug dealing.</p> <p>Death of father while he was in prison became a turning point.</p> <p>Used prayer for managing time in prison and to reorder his life goals.</p> | <p>Desisted from crime. Main focus was on his role as a 'family man'.</p> <p>Had found work through the help of family.</p> <p>Strong involvement in religious community.</p> |

Dawood, age 31, White (Roma and French), Sufi-Muslim (convert), conviction for assault and drug dealing, longest prison term: 18 months.

| Childhood | Adolescence | Prison | After prison |
|--|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Close friendships with Muslim children | Moved away from mosque but continued | Served two prison sentences for | Had desisted for a long period. Went |

| | | | |
|---|---|--|---|
| <p>in his neighbourhood. Spent time at the mosque with friends.</p> <p>Learnt Islamic prayers and rituals</p> | <p>to pray on his own.</p> <p>Became increasingly involved with a new set of friends in his neighbourhood.</p> <p>Arrested several times for violent assault.</p> | <p>assault.</p> <p>Became interested in Islam again in prison. Had dreams he regarded as significant.</p> <p>Converted after release from second sentence.</p> | <p>back to crime to make money. Had been arrested for selling drugs and was awaiting his sentence.</p> <p>He was employed and involved in caring for his children. Was worried about the disruption to the life he had built through a possible conviction and prison sentence.</p> <p>Reconnected with childhood friends and mosque.</p> <p>Strong involvement in religious community.</p> |
|---|---|--|---|

Ilyas, age 37, British Pakistan, Sufi-Muslim, conviction for robbery and fraud, longest prison term: 2 years.

| Childhood | Adolescence | Prison | After prison |
|--|--|---|---|
| <p>Grew up in a Sufi Muslim household.</p> <p>Was arrested at the age of 10 for vandalism, was not charged.</p> <p>Formed a gang at the age of 13 to protect himself from racist attacks in his neighbourhood and at his school.</p> | <p>Through his childhood gang, he became involved in credit card fraud and armed robberies.</p> <p>Moved away from his childhood mosque and was part of an Islamist extremist group.</p> | <p>Served one sentence at the age of 23 for armed robbery. Two years in prison.</p> <p>Remained connected to his Islamist group in prison.</p> <p>Became friends with Immad in prison. This friendship became important in helping him move</p> | <p>Had desisted from crime, was no longer supportive of Islamist terrorism. Had moved away from the city where he grew up, this distance from his extremist group was important in helping him desist.</p> <p>Had got married and was working full-time as a builder.</p> <p>Strong involvement</p> |

| | | | |
|--|--|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| | | away from his extremist group. | in religious community. |
|--|--|--------------------------------|-------------------------|

Mohammad, 33, British Pakistan, Sunni, conviction for armed robbery and drugs, longest prison term: 3 years.

| Childhood | Adolescence | Prison | After prison |
|---|---|--|---|
| Parental divorce, loss of contact with father, experience of sexual abuse. Felt alienated from peers in a private school he attended on a bursary. Became involved in selling and using drugs at his school. Was excluded several times but managed to complete school and gain entry to university. Casual Muslim | Started a degree in Computer Science. Had a psychotic breakdown during his second year at university. He was diagnosed with schizophrenia. Completed university degree but did not take up employment due to mental health condition. Remained involved in selling and using drugs | Served three years in prison for armed robbery. He was a casual Muslim through most of his time in prison. Became part of a Muslim collective in one prison. Moved away from this after he was shifted to a prison close to his home. | After release had resettled in his neighbourhood, was living with his mother. Unclear if he had desisted from crime. Casual Muslim. |

Rahim, 34, British Pakistan, Sufi-Muslim, conviction for fraud, community sentence: 6 months

| Childhood | Adolescence | Prison | After prison |
|---|---|--------|--|
| Authoritarian parenting in childhood. Strong emphasis on academic achievement by parents. Close involvement in mosque but did not enjoy it as the Imam was authoritarian and strict. | Completed a degree in Business and IT. Joined a new mosque through friends at university. Became involved in a fraud through friends at his mosque. Served six-weeks of community service. | NA | Desisted from crime. Was running a small courier service and driving taxis. Married and had three children. Emphasis on role as 'family man'. Strong involvement in religious community. |

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Yousef, 51, White Irish, Sufi-Muslim (convert), conviction for involvement with Irish Republic Army (IRA), longest prison term: 9 years.

| Childhood | Adolescence | Prison | After prison |
|---|--|---|---|
| <p>Grew up in Belfast during the 'troubles'. Was part of a devout Irish Catholic family.</p> <p>Placed emphasis on spirituality as important for him. Became involved in fights based on ethnic and religious differences from a young age.</p> | <p>Arrested at the age of fifteen for his involvement with the IRA.</p> <p>Was introduced to Islam through a film in which he heard the Muslim call to prayer. Became curious about Islam.</p> | <p>Served several long sentences.</p> <p>Imprisonment experience was in Northern Ireland.</p> | <p>He converted at the age of 40. Was part of a Sufi mosque. Had shifted to England permanently.</p> <p>Found settling away from Belfast within a new community as important in helping him desist.</p> <p>Strong involvement in religious community.</p> |

Zulfikar, 33, British Pakistan, Sunni, assault, longest prison term: 2 years.

| Childhood | Adolescence | Prison | After prison |
|--|--|--|--|
| <p>Religious upbringing.</p> <p>Three siblings died during childhood, mother had a brain tumour and became bedridden.</p> <p>Experienced racist bullying in school and formed a gang for protection.</p> <p>Started taking class A drugs and was involved in burglaries.</p> | <p>Mother died when he was 18. He tried to move away from crime, got married and joined university to study law.</p> <p>Kept taking drugs and quit university after a year.</p> <p>Went back to committing burglaries, car theft and drug dealing.</p> | <p>Had been in and out of prison over nine times. Served several small sentences.</p> <p>Had a difficult time in prison.</p> <p>After his last sentence, he was recalled to prison twice, once for breach of order and second time for involvement in car theft.</p> | <p>Was serving a community order for assault.</p> <p>Did not have secure housing, no form of employment, was wanting to end his marriage as his wife was in Pakistan and he did not think she would get a visa to come to Britain.</p> <p>Casual Muslim.</p> |

Ahmed, age 45, British Bangladeshi, Sunni, conviction for sex with underage girl, longest prison term: 2 years.

| Childhood | Adolescence | Prison | After prison |
|---|--|--|--|
| <p>Strict authoritarian parenting.</p> <p>Emphasis on ritualistic religious learning.</p> | <p>Joined university to study Biomedical sciences. Left without completing his degree as his father became unwell.</p> <p>Got married at 19. Worked in father's takeaway business and eventually moved to working as a business analyst.</p> <p>Was dissatisfied with marriage and started grooming young girls online.</p> <p>Had a sexual relationship with a girl under the age of legal consent.</p> | <p>Two years in prison for sex with a girl under the age of legal consent.</p> <p>Became more religious in prison.</p> | <p>Was training to become a physical fitness instructor.</p> <p>Had restrictions on contact with his children.</p> <p>Had desisted from crime.</p> <p>Casual Muslim.</p> |

Imran, age 30, British Pakistan, Sufi, conviction for assault, longest prison term: 2 years.

| Childhood | Adolescence | Prison | After prison |
|--|--|---|---|
| <p>Childhood in religious community.</p> <p>Became involved in crime through friends in his neighbourhood.</p> | <p>Increased involvement in neighbourhood.</p> <p>Got married at 19 but peer relationships continued to be important.</p> <p>Moved away from religious practise.</p> | <p>First prison sentence for assault.</p> <p>Second time for intimidating a witness.</p> <p>Found comfort in praying while in prison.</p> <p>His daughter was also born when he was inside. This made him want to</p> | <p>Was running a call centre with the help of friends.</p> <p>Had strong involvement in his religious community.</p> <p>Had desisted from crime.</p> <p>Emphasis on role as 'family man.'</p> |

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Hameed, age 21, Mixed race (Black African and Caribbean), born Muslim, conviction for drug dealing, longest prison term: 9 months.

| Childhood | Adolescence | Prison | After prison |
|--|---|---|---|
| <p>Early childhood was happy.</p> <p>Parental divorce when he was 15, he was also diagnosed with leukaemia at this age.</p> <p>Became disruptive in school and was excluded several times.</p> | <p>Finished a few college courses and wanted to train as a builder. Did not have funding for his course and became involved in drug dealing to make money for course.</p> | <p>Casual Muslim.</p> <p>Found the environment hostile towards Muslims in one prison.</p> | <p>Found funding for training as a builder with the help of probation.</p> <p>Was working as a builder.</p> <p>Had desisted from crime.</p> <p>Casual Muslim.</p> |

Vin, age 21, Mixed race (Indian and black Caribbean), convert, conviction for burglary, longest prison term: 15 months.

| Childhood | Adolescence | Prison | After prison |
|--|---|------------------------------------|---|
| <p>Parental divorce when he was 5.</p> <p>Mother asked him to leave her house when he was 11.</p> <p>Moved in with father who was disabled.</p> <p>Became disruptive in school and was excluded several times.</p> <p>Arrested at the age of 13, was not charged but this became a turning point. Joined a gang.</p> | <p>Became involved in drug dealing, gangs and burglaries through neighbourhood friends.</p> <p>Converted to Islam through the influence of his half-brother who had converted to Islam.</p> <p>Tried to move away from crime. Desisted for a short period but was drawn back to involvement in crime.</p> | <p>Became religious in prison.</p> | <p>Was still taking Cannabis, had been evicted from his accommodation for falling behind on rent.</p> <p>Was unemployed.</p> <p>Casual Muslim</p> |

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| Involvement in shoplifting, violence, taking and selling drugs from a young age. | | | |
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Waqar, age 21, African- Somali, born Muslim, conviction for drug dealing and robbery, longest prison term: 11 months.

| Childhood | Adolescence | Prison | After prison |
|--|--|----------------------------------|---|
| Death of sister when he was 5. Became increasingly aggressive in school. Excluded several times. | Went for religious studies course after end of school. Became more involved in crime on his return. | Became more religious in prison. | Was unemployed. Had applied for a course in Oil and Gas Management. Wanted to set up his own company. Casual Muslim. |

Naveed, age 40, British Pakistani, born-Muslim, conviction for murder, longest prison term: 17 years.

| Childhood | Adolescence | Prison | After prison |
|---|---|--|--|
| Strict authoritarian parenting. Father abusive towards him and his mother. Secular childhood. Experienced racist bullying in school. | Joined college, learnt how to fight to protect himself with the help of a friend. Became involved in altercation through this friend in which one of the opponents received a fatal wound. | Convicted for murder at the age of 19. Served 17 years in prison. Death of father while in prison became a turning point. Completed his A levels and a degree in criminology in prison. | Working full-time. Desisted from crime. Role of wounded healer. Married, had a son. Casual Muslim. |

Ali, age 44, White Irish, convert, conviction for attempted murder, longest prison term: 9 years.

| Childhood | Adolescence | Prison | After prison |
|---|--|--|--|
| <p>Grew up in a tightknit Irish catholic community in London.</p> <p>Parents divorced, strained relationship with father who was an alcoholic and abusive.</p> <p>Difficult relationship with mother due to her partner.</p> <p>Was excluded from school several times.</p> | <p>Ran away from home at the age of fifteen.</p> <p>Lost contact with family and community.</p> <p>Started living on the street.</p> <p>Became involved in a Chinese gang and converted to Buddhism.</p> | <p>Served 9 years in prison.</p> <p>Converted to Islam in prison.</p> <p>Described himself as a Salafi Muslim. Reconnected with his mother after his conversion.</p> <p>Received increased scrutiny in prison due to conversion.</p> <p>Was part of a Muslim gang in one prison.</p> <p>Got married in prison.</p> | <p>Desisted from crime. Role of 'family man'. Married with a step-daughter. Also had a son but was estranged from him.</p> <p>Had worked in several part-time jobs since release.</p> <p>Reconnected with family and childhood community.</p> <p>Had periods of religious doubt, and had become more involved in religious community to strengthen his belief.</p> |

Immad, age 37, British Pakistani, born-Muslim, conviction for assault and credit card fraud, longest prison term: 5 years.

| Childhood | Adolescence | Prison | After prison |
|--|--|---|---|
| <p>Childhood within a mosque community.</p> <p>Spiritual sense-making important.</p> <p>Early involvement in crime through neighbourhood.</p> <p>Served several community sentences.</p> | <p>Parents sent him to Pakistan as punishment.</p> <p>Came back and increased involvement in crime.</p> <p>Involved in violence, drug dealing and credit card fraud.</p> | <p>First prison sentence at twenty-one.</p> <p>Final time on remand.</p> <p>Turned to religion each time he was in prison.</p> <p>Remained involved in selling drugs and Other counterfeit items.</p> | <p>Remained involved in crime.</p> <p>Regular religious prayer was part of his daily routine.</p> <p>Married and had a daughter.</p> <p>Was unemployed.</p> |

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| | Got married but peer relationships remained important. | | |
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Steve, age 23, Mixed race (Guyana and Montenegro), convert, conviction for drug dealing, longest prison term: 8 months.

| Childhood | Adolescence | Prison | After prison |
|--|--|---|--|
| Parent's divorce, mother working long hours, lack of parental supervision. Involved in selling and taking drugs from the age of twelve. | Was arrested while at college. Even though he was released without charge he did not go back to college. Converted after release from prison. Tried to desist from crime. Was drawn back to crime after his contractual job ended. | Became interested in Islam in YOI Feltham. Turned to religion in prison. | Had been out of prison for less than a month. Was looking for work. Wanted to work as a youth mentor. Was in a committed relationship. Casual Muslim. |

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the method adopted, issues with gaining access, sampling, coding, and reflections on my field experiences. I have also discussed measures taken to mitigate risks and provided brief descriptions of the participants of this study.

Life story narratives are seen as dependent on context. The methodology acknowledges that the life story elicited through such an approach is influenced by the relationship of the researcher and the participant (Harrison, 2009; Kakuru & Paradza, 2013). Research with marginalised and hard to access groups prioritises convenience in sampling and data collection. In this project, access has been one of the most challenging aspects of the research process. The difficulty in conducting follow up interviews with a significant number of research participants was recognised from the outset of the study. The research design however, still prioritised multiple interviews as this allowed for deeper engagement and

building of rapport with participants. The oral life story method, with its level of detail and engagement, limits the sample size of such a study. However, by starting with a larger sample of twenty-one participants, I was able to have a deeper engagement with a smaller group within the sample while having the advantages of a more diverse group of participants.

The reflexivity section has outlined some of the ways in which my biography, ethnicity, religion and gender influenced the process of data collection. The research makes no claim towards ‘authenticity’ or ‘truth’: instead it acknowledges and discusses the relational and constructivist nature of the data collection process. The research has prioritised presenting a plurality of perspectives which are seen as contingent. The advantages and limitations of the research based on these influences have been clearly discussed in this section. By outlining the process of study, the researcher has tried to provide an honest and accessible account of the research. This account will also benefit future researchers attempting to study any of the areas related to this research.

4: Childhood

The previous chapter outlined the methodological underpinnings of this research, along with the main characteristics of the sample and the data collection process. I begin discussing the empirical research findings by examining the ways in which participants described religious practice during their childhood. These accounts of childhood provided important links on which participants built their story to the present. These recollections were important due to the continuing meaning these memories had in the development of the life story to the present.

Respondents described religion in childhood in different ways. For some of the participants the retrospective memories of childhood, evoked nostalgia about shared activities, stories and relationships built within small close-knit kinship communities. Participants described their sense of rootedness in community and described ways in which their ties were distinctive in how they were viewed and how they interacted with others. These kinship ties were not exclusive, even during childhood: they were always one of many affiliations that participants regarded as important. The sense of belonging to community and the connections forged outside of it provide important insights into the development of social connection both within communities as well as across differences (Brah, 1991, 1996).

Following this, I discuss the importance of spiritual sense making from early childhood by outlining how religious prayer and other rituals, together with beliefs in the supernatural, were part of religious education from childhood. Spirituality from a young age was a way of attaching meaning to traumatic life experiences and helped participants give meaning to difficult life events. Along with this the spiritual sense making helped participants to transcend these traumatic events, give these events positive meaning and to see their lives as progressing beyond these experiences.

I also discuss the experiences of participants who did not see religion as significant during childhood. For these respondents, religion was limited to a belief in a higher power with a loose sense of affiliation to a religious denomination. These participants saw religion as peripheral to other aspects of their life to which they attached more significance. These descriptions of an absence of religion were usually linked to later changes to identity through

which religion became more important.

The life story interviews also generated data on events and experiences which were not related to religious practise or belief. Childhood memories focused on the precarity of growing up in households marked by disrupted family relationships, economic disadvantage as well as social and political marginalisation. The recollections of parental absence, as well as strained relationships provide a window into the ways in which socio-economic disadvantage not only represent a scarcity of material resources but also seeps into personal relationships and influences mental health.

The life stories also provided rich descriptions of participants' social relationships and experiences within social spaces they occupied during childhood, such as schools or their neighbourhoods. These institutional and social interactions are key to understanding the strengthening of bonds or fractures to social belonging that occur early on in life and the longer-term implications of these experiences on self-identity.

I draw attention to socio-economic disadvantage, experiences of poverty and racist violence as playing a significant role from childhood in the formation of a sense of self. Childhood experiences were significantly influenced by the intersection of gender, class and race. The life story accounts draw attention to the ways in which participants place themselves, sometimes in contradictory ways, in different social settings. This focus on the everyday is a way of bringing to the fore the ways in which 'formations of identity, racism and multi-culture is manifest in everyday life'(Les Back, 1996: 6).

4.1. Religious Influences on Identity in Childhood

This section discusses the differing ways in which religious adherence was described during childhood. It starts by discussing the importance of religious kinship communities in memories of childhood.

4.1.1. Religious belonging and voluntary kinship networks

Within academic literature, close-knit social networks that are not based on familial ties but are actively chosen relationships which function in the same way as family are given different

labels such as fictive kin (Ebaugh and Curry, 2000), voluntary kin (Braithwaite et al., 2010) or chosen kin. Ebaugh and Curry (2000) describe fictive kinship as

‘family-type relationships, based not on blood or marriage but rather on religious rituals or close friendship ties, constitute[ing] a type of social capital that many immigrant groups bring with them and that facilitates their incorporation into the host society’.

This definition helps outline significant relationships that are formed on the basis of shared religious understanding and ethnic belonging which are important for immigrant groups in helping them settle. Both ethnic and religious capital work in different ways in creating a sense of shared connection and mutual obligation. Religious capital plays an important role in enforcing ideas of a common good by making social obligation a matter of faith (Putnam and Campbell, 2010). Meanwhile shared ethnic heritage means that there are commonalities in terms of language, food, and a connection to a shared place of origin, which are also important in the formation of close relationships. These shared ethnic and religious ties provide networks through which knowledge, resources and practises can be shared (Mellor and Gilliat-Ray, 2015). This intersecting of ethnic and religious ties in the formations of social networks emerged as significant in the life stories of participants. The importance of such connections from a young age underscores the import of such networks in lives of immigrants.

However, the term fictive kin has been the subject of critique as it seems to suggest the relationships formed on the basis of a shared religion are not real (fictive) (Braithwaite *et al.*, 2010). The term fictive kin is also problematic as it is only applied in a racialised way to discuss close-knit non-familial relationships within minority communities (Nelson, 2014). In this sense, it is important to recognise that such kinship type relationships formed on the basis of shared ethnicity, neighbourhood, or religion are not just limited to minority communities and there may be a danger in exoticising an ordinary form of social interaction and engagement. In fact the idea of social capital which is central to understanding the importance of kinship communities was initially used to study elite groups (Bourdieu, 1984).

The term voluntary kin however, is still useful in describing the significance of self-chosen kinship relationships and networks that form on the basis of a shared religious and ethnic

background. I describe the significance of religious kinship and the development of small religious communities through examples from the participants that I drew from a mosque in the North of England. This community was predominantly British Pakistani, from the region of Kashmir, and followed a version of Sufi Islam.

Abdullah¹⁵ a second generation, British Pakistani immigrant, was a member of this community. Abdullah's grandfather moved to the UK in the 1950s. He came with a group of friends from his village in Azad Kashmir, Pakistan. These friends lived together in a house in Bradford and worked in factories in the area. In the 1960s, Abdullah's grandfather called his son (Abdullah's father) to England and a few years later Abdullah's mother joined him. Abdullah was born in England and was the eldest child in his family. Gradually the group of friends who arrived here together all acquired their own houses and put together the finances to set up their own mosque. I drew eight of the participants from this mosque and for most of the participants, the experience of their parents immigrating from their village in Kashmir was similar to those of Abdullah's grandfather.

The group of friends that Abdullah's grandfather immigrated with were important social connections for Abdullah during his childhood. For Abdullah, rather than religious teachings or rituals, the significance of religion in childhood was the time spent with peers and with older members of the community.

Baba (a teacher at the mosque) used to teach the Islamia class in the Masjid. So that was every Saturday, so we used to come here on Saturdays, listen to the stories so that was like a, it was a good thing because it's like, when someone tells you the story, it's how they tell the story, it's not the story itself. So, you know the way they used to teach you and tell you, it was that, you know that pull you get, you wanna go, so it was that always bringing us back... So, it's how people make you feel, around you innit.

'Obviously they (father) have to work and it's not like you get to see your father that much anyway because you know he was always workin, but then you know it's an

¹⁵ Abdullah, 44, British Pakistani, Sufi- Muslim, conviction for drug dealing, longest prison term: 2 years.

everyday thing innit. It's like they work and you go to school and you come back, you go to the masjid (mosque) and then you only get a bit of playtime and then you're back in bed and that's it. It's just routine, coming back and forward and obviously if you was lucky, somewhere down the road you'd probably get a holiday and that would be Pakistan. You know simple, you know stuff like that, and I'd been blessed like that because obviously our parents were very strict, and they were part of the masjid here to the organise. So, when they first started building the mosque here it was this one, and obviously my father was a member here and he was one of the main people you know who helped and you know contributed his time and did the Mosque Chandaa (raising funds for running a mosque) stuff like that, cleaning. We got involved in the mosque as well, you know because you know seeing your dad involved and we got involved – so simple things like that.'

Akhtar, (2014) suggests that religious practices in British Pakistani communities are a way of passing on cultural traditions and customs to younger generations. Along with this it fostered a sense of responsibility towards the religious community (Hicks, 2008; Mellor and Gilliat-Ray, 2015).

When we was about 12, they brought us bonsai trees, you know them small bonsai trees. They bought about 15, 16 of 'em and they put them specifically around the mosque windows and they had the name tags. So, they said this bonsai tree would die if you don't look after it and you have to trim it, you have to water it, you have to look after it. And they have to grow and grow and grow and grow, and it stays here, and obviously they say, you know, plants and stuff like that, they do Dhikr¹⁶ and everything like that so obviously if it stays alive, looks after, and people look and say 'wow that looks nice', you'll get blessing for it. So, you know, you got a duty to come here make sure this tree stays well, you know stuff like that. He (imam) used to present, make stuff like that up, and then you used to go back and make sure the tree's alright, no body's been messing about with it. You know stuff like that, you know.

These early childhood experiences shaped Abdullah's understanding of himself. Rather than

¹⁶ Dhikr is the essential form of prayer in Sufism (tasawwuf). Sufi Muslims believe that all of God's creation is continuously in a state of Dhikr.

explaining his identity in individualistic terms, he described his identity as grounded in his kinship network.

‘My pahchaan (identity)? My pahchaan (identity) is my family innit. I know who I am; I know who I’m about. I can’t explain that, it’s hard, but I know who I am, I know what I am.’

Abdullah described his identity as rooted within ideas of family, kinship, religion and ethnicity, in which his Pakistani- Muslim neighbourhood and mosque play a vital role in creating a sense of community. He separated his experience within his Asian community from the stereotypes of social isolationism which is associated with minority communities, particularly British Muslims in public discourse.

Neighbourhood was nice, it was a community Asian – there wasn’t that many Asians at the time but eventually when time went on, more families started movin’ in and it was okay, it was quite open, you know not like a hard core Asian community. Still today it’s not a hard core Asian community you know where you go into other towns - Rochdale, Oldham and certain parts in Manchester, there’s a big Asian community. It looks big from outside but when you come in it’s not that big, it’s only a couple a streets.

Abdullah and all of the participants of this research describe friendship groups that were important outside their family and kinship network from a young age, usually the start of primary school. The kinship community was only one of the social spaces that was significant, that too for a small number of participants.

While interaction outside the community was commonplace, it was rarer to have new members join these kinship communities which were based on intergenerational links going back to Abdullah’s village. Dawood, a white mixed-race convert, was a rare exception who became a part of this community at a young age through his friendship with Asian children in his neighbourhood. Dawood enjoyed learning Arabic with his friends. He had fond memories of his time at the mosque with his friends.

I went to (name of school) primary where I always hung out with the Asian lads, grew up with Asian lads. From a young age I used to go to their house after school, they used to have to go to mosque, so their father used to take me to mosque as well. So, from the age of 7, 8 I knew about 6, 7 Surahs (verses of the Quran) by heart then.

Dawood's parents were not very religious; they did not mind his interest in Islam.

They're not into religion at all. My dad thinks that religion is for people who are stupid basically, my mum's Christian but she doesn't really practice. The only time we go church is marriages, deaths and weddings stuff like that. But yeah, she does believe in God definitely.

From his interest in Arabic, Dawood became involved with a Dhikr¹⁷ group. This mainly involved recitation of prayers in Arabic in a group setting. Dawood became a regular member at this group and made many close friends. As Dawood grew older, his friendship group changed, and he stopped going to the mosque. However, he retained his habit of doing Dhikr on his own, usually on a daily basis. He also kept up with his prayers. Like Abdullah and Dawood, Zulfikar, Immad and Imran also described similar childhood experiences of fun and play along with religious lessons in a community setting.

However, for Rahim, another British Pakistani participant, who had a similar upbringing, his mosque experience was different. His experience outlines some of the negative aspects of religious communities in which elders, older members with positions of religious authority, can dominate to the detriment of younger members (Shah, 2007). However, Rahim's recollections of his childhood are also influenced by a change that occurred later in his life during adolescence in which he moved away from his childhood mosque and joined another mosque in his town. This change, highlights the fluid and voluntary nature of kinship connections (more on this later).

¹⁷ Dhikr is the essential form of prayer in Sufism (tasawwuf). Followers of Sufism often engage in ritualized Dhikr ceremonies, the details of which may vary between different Sufi orders (tariqahs). Each order, or lineage within an order, has one or more ritualized forms for group Dhikr, the collection of which may include recitation, singing, music, sama (whirling) and tafakkur (contemplation).
<http://www.rifai.org/sufism/english/sufi-practices/dhikr>

The rest of us were under pressure 'cause he (imam) used to beat us up anyway so Yeah, cause we were worried like if anyone speaks he'll just come and slap you one in front of everyone, but that's standard that happens in every mosque anyway you already know that don't you? Yeah. He had techniques; he had his own strategies in beating people as well you know like I don't know about other stuff but he taught you know he revolutionize how to beat up kids you know he'd bring pens into play you know he'd bring pens yeah honestly the torture series on channel 1 I think that's where he was seriously. You seen, someone slap with one hand, have you ever seen someone slap with two hands? Yeah, we used to get slapped with two hands simultaneously not like one or two, twice like this seriously... Yeah so that was that Masjid (mosque). You get sick of it after a bit I'll be honest with you.

Similar to the experiences described by Abdullah and Rahim, Ali and Yousef (two of the Irish Catholic converts) described their childhood as located within close-knit Irish Catholic communities. Ali had access to an Irish Catholic community in South London through his father, and Yousef grew up in Belfast. Similar to Abdullah and Rahim's experiences where they learnt about Pakistani culture and language along with religious education in their mosque, for Ali and Yousef, religion was linked to a strong Irish ethnicity. In fact, for Ali, Irish and Catholic were almost interchangeable terms in childhood.

I mean I was brought up Catholic. Erm strong Irish Catholic from when I was really young. I had my holy communion, you know we used to go church Wednesdays and Sundays. Erm my primary, my infant school, my primary school I was taught by priests and nuns it was very Irish. It was very Irish, traditional Irish or traditional Catholic rather than Irish erm so yeah I was brought up there.

Ali also emphasised the importance of intergenerational relationships in a broader kinship network with whom he shared religion and ethnicity. For Ali, the shared spaces of community engagement included Irish neighbourhoods, faith schools, Irish pubs and the church.

Yeah, yeah, you knew you were an Irish kid. Cause my Nan had a deep Irish accent, 'Shaun, Shaun, come here'... so. My uncles my dad, more on my dad's side than my mum's... from my mum's side, they are more south London kinda mentality, while

on my Dad's side they are still very much Irish republicans. They have this, yeah, we're here but our hearts are all in Ireland, that kinda mentality. You know, all my uncles, hah typical; my dad's name's Jerry - Eugene, Michael, Paddy Ian, you know, so all very Irish names you know. Yeah, and you know at weddings there'd always be Irish music you— and my family in South East London used to be quite big, quite big then, all gone out now. We had other big Irish families like the Dempseys, the Kennedys and they were all connected to kinda all my family, so yeah. You go to a pub and instantly, 'You're Jerry's son aren't you?' So yeah, you were brought up to feel you were Irish. Especially my dad, he has our shield, he has our crest. We have a family crest, we have a family shield and we have a family tartan 'cause the Irish also had tartans and we have a family tartan. So he's very staunch.

Although Ali's community brought together his Irish ethnicity and the religion he grew up in, he saw his position in it in ethnic terms. He preferred to use Irish rather than Catholic when talking about his school and his neighbourhood. While he attended church regularly and was studying in a Catholic school, he did not think of religion as important in his life. In the interview, he spoke of his childhood as strong Irish Catholic, then contradicted it and minimised the importance of religion. This possibly links to later changes in Ali's life as he converted to Islam, nevertheless the significance he attached to his ethnic heritage in childhood was significant as this was an aspect of his identity that remained important despite his conversion away from Catholicism. This minimising of religious childhood experience while emphasising a spiritual connection was quite common in the life stories of participants who went through religious changes later in life (more later).

I was brought up there erm we used to go church, but religion never played a real part up until I was about 11. My mum started to really get into kind of spiritualism, you know she started searching for something so and I think her effect of that searching made me start to search. I was kind of in and out of doing martial arts so you know Buddhism kind of attracted me erm and then Daoism you know the Chinese religion that kind of attracted me, but you know it was nothing really serious, but I knew I believed in God. There was no doubt, I knew that, and I think I used to convince myself there's no way I can just be here and that's it you know and so yeah.

The emphasis on social connections seems consistent with the experience of some of the born Muslims who emphasised the importance of social relationships and activities within a religious community rather than religious learning or ritual. For participants who regarded their religious community as important during childhood, this community involvement was usually only important in early childhood up to the age of eleven. By the time they entered secondary school, their classes at the mosque came to an end and they had more freedom to spend time outside in their neighbourhood on their own. At this stage, they lost interest in religion and were more interested in figuring out their identity in their diverse peer groups. Thus, the effects of neighbourhood and peer group became significant for a majority of participants as they grew older and started making friendships outside their family. I will discuss this later on in the chapter. In relation to religion, participants either started to explore other religions as was the case for Ali, or completely moved away from religion. The next section discusses spiritual sense-making, which is another important aspect of religious learning in childhood.

4.12. Spiritual sense-making

Religion is seen to provide frames of reference through which adherents seek to make sense of their life (Pargament *et al.*, 1988, 1990). These frames of reference are used to understand, predict and respond to life events as well as to form an understanding of a self as evolving over time. In this section I focus on religious meaning making in which participants described life events through a frame in which their life was ordered through forces outside their control. Sociological study of religion has emphasised the importance of religion as a way of finding meaning to deal with emotional distress, social injustice and loss (Jackson and Pepper, 2011). ‘Other Worldly’ form of sense making was particularly important in dealing with emotional and difficult situations. I argue that prayer and belief in an active God gave hope to participants and helped them detach from difficult life experiences, however it also led to an attendant passiveness in which participants did not see themselves as active agents in their lives (Pargament *et al.*, 1988). In giving order to life stories, these participants saw their lives as an inevitable sequence of events which were externally driven.

Immad's¹⁸ life story highlights the importance of spiritual sense-making in the lives of Sufi Muslims. A thread that connected the different aspects of Immad's life was the importance of supernatural events and forces outside of him that seemed to influence the course of his life. His story was a mixture of unavoidable tragedies as well as unexplained miracles. This transcendental sense-making was passed down to Immad by his parents through the stories they told him of their early life together before he was born. Starting from the story of his parent's immigration to England, Immad described how their immigration was a special miracle bought about by the power of their family's spiritual guide.

I think they come together yeah, they come together. What had happened was my mum didn't get a visa I don't think but I remember my mum telling us that don't say out to nobody that when my dad got his visa to come here she didn't have no visa and when everyone was seeing my dad off there was I think it was Hazrit Pir Saab from Golrah Sherif and they said to my mum "you go as well what you waiting for?" so my mum goes "I got no visa or nothing" you know they go "just go." So my mum got in the taxi in Pakistan and went and they said there was so many people in Islamabad them days because everyone was getting their visas. They go someone just walked out the crowd went over to my mum and said "are you Mahmood" or something so she said "yeah" and gave her the visa. My mum told me that.

Following on from that, Immad explained how his father had struggled to have children with his first wife. He explained this by describing a supernatural presence in his father's ancestral home in Pakistan that had cursed his father's family. This curse was overturned by following the advice of their family pir and turning the family home into a religious seminary.

The house was really, really old when we went there. Think it was possessed from the old days of when the Sikhs had a fight with the Muslims, there was, they used to burn bodies over in India in Kashmir, but people, my cousin used to tell me that our hallway where our house is, that were used as a burning point for burning bodies.. And erm they erm they attracted bad things to the house and there used to be a, they call 'em, they call 'em churehl (evil spirit), that's what they call 'em anyway and erm,

¹⁸ Immad, age 37, British Pakistani, Sufi-Muslim, conviction for assault and credit card fraud, longest prison term: 5 years.

used to erm, I think it damaged the house, it done something, that's when we'd come back, my father because of what had happened and I was with him anyway and erm, and I think erm, my father got some, went to see some Bazurgh (spiritual guide) in Kotli Gular Sharif (place in Pakistan) and erm, and think they give him some stones or something and they done some dua (prayer) and they said build a dars (a place of worship and religious learning) where the house is and erm, it won't do no harm to ya. But the vision before that I think my father's married was before and the children kept, the boys kept dying and erm when one of them passed away, the so-called thing used to scream at night from the river right next to our house.

This theme carried on throughout Immad's life: he explained all the difficulties in his life as divinely ordained or caused by supernatural spirits. Throughout his story, the power of his prayers or his family's prayers had helped him to overcome difficult situations. Regardless of the circumstances of his life, Immad was able to provide explanations based on his internal logic, which were not connected to the 'facts' or material circumstances in which he was an active player.

For Yousef (Irish Catholic, fifty-one years old) who grew up in Belfast at the time of the 'Irish troubles,' painful memories of bullying and ridicule were significant in influencing the direction of his life. He saw his involvement in fights from a young age as a way of 'protectin his family'.

My family are very Irish orientated, amazingly. My brothers are all champion Irish dancers and all that stuff. I didn't, mum did, I just erm, God forgive me I love them like. But it wasn't for me, but it wasn't for me. So there'd be a lot of arguing...ermm, my mum would want me to do it and I wouldn't wanna do it. Growing up in Belfast, it's no excuse but, I believe your past leads you to where ever you are in the future. Every path you're on is for a reason... So kinda growing up in Belfast, Belfast isn't. It's beautiful, the people in there are beautiful like. But I mean it just caused me grief constantly. You know people sorta goin' 'Oh your brother's wearing a skirt' and all. And then before you know it, you end up lookin' after your family kinda thing. I have no problem with that. But it was just the extra grief. Aye they would make fun of them and then because they were my brothers I would be stickin' up for them. And then there would be arguments with my mum, not arguments. My mum would be

shoutin' at me, know, 'Jesus, what're you at?' slap whatever... you can't turn around and say, 'They're on about it'. I think it's b'cause of the, when the English came in and divided the country and all that a lot of people hang onto their heritage to keep it strong. You know the Irish language, my brothers done Irish dancin', were brilliant at it they're world champions and all that, Irish music.

Even though outside on the street and with his family Yousef acted tough, on his own he was 'devastated' by the violence. Spiritual sense-making to detach from life events (Thomas, 2011) was an important part of his childhood.

I've always, always been close to God, always, always, even as kids, always, as in just am. I love it. I just love, 24 hours of it. Constantly, constantly thinking about God, it sounds mad but it just is, all the time, even as a little kid, all the time – nature, trees. Wouldn't be saying MashAllah¹⁹ or anything like that, like, just 'Excellent and you look beautiful' but there may a tree beside it, that's lost its leaves and you feel sad don't you? So I know it sounds mad, just like that, so you'd be looking at the other tree sort of going 'You look excellent too. This only looks excellent because you look the way you look beside it but then your turn will come'. And birds or whatever it is, both, I just like nature. I can go into the forest and the stuff will come to me. I don't mean magical, I mean, I like making sense of things and not giving any grief if it's not giving me any.

Although Yousef tried to escape the conflict in Belfast, he was drawn into the violence more and more as he grew older. Yousef's house was searched several times by the police. He had memories of his mother being mistreated and mishandled by the police while they searched his house. His first serious offence was an attack on one of the officers with a hurling stick. After this incident Yousef became involved with the IRA. His first prison sentence was at the age of fifteen. In the next chapter I discuss in more detail how spirituality was central to how Yousef neutralised his increased involvement in crime.

¹⁹ Means 'praise to Allah' in Arabic. it is common practise to say it when moved by nature or any other 'divine' creation.

Similarly, Mohammad²⁰ (British Pakistani) adopted a fatalistic approach to explaining his exclusion from school at the age of thirteen or fourteen for selling cannabis. By explaining the actions that led to his exclusion as predestined, Mohammad could see himself as a victim caught in events beyond his control.

‘Ahh no she (mother) was devastated. She was devastated I remember and humiliated and yeah I mean if there’s things, a few things I could go back in time and change that (school exclusion) would be one of them you know, but I mean everything’s for a reason you know I mean if it wasn’t then, then maybe it could have been worse at a later time, a later date or later, older age could have been something much more worse so you know. I have to be content with you know whatever, whatever is in my kismet (destiny) you know’.

Spiritual sense-making was an important source of meaning. Participants saw spiritualism as important in helping them cope with difficult life experiences. I now turn to the experiences of participants who affiliated with a religion but did not see religious beliefs and teachings as playing a significant part in their day to day life in childhood.

4.13. *‘Believing without belonging’²¹*

In this section I discuss the religious affiliation of four converts, Ammar, Dawood, Steve and Vin, along with born Muslims, Ahmed, Mohammad, Naveed, Hameed and Ilyas. This group of participants had a belief in a higher power or God, they had a loose affiliation to a particular religious denomination, but their attendance at a place of worship was limited to special occasions, such as birth, marriage or death. Grace Davie describes this form of religious practise as vicarious religion (Davie, 1990, 2000, 2012). In a series of books and articles, she argues that despite the falling rates of attendance at church within Britain, the majority of Britons maintain a belief in God with a loose sense of connection to ‘soft’ religious. ‘Soft’ religious practises include a religious disposition, some statements of belief and a loose denominational affiliation. These aspects of religion have remained significant despite a decline in more orthodox religious beliefs and practises.

²⁰ Mohammad, 33, British Pakistan, Sunni, conviction for armed robbery and drugs, longest prison term: 3 years.

²¹ (Davie, 1990, 2000, 2012)

This section discusses the childhood experiences of this group by drawing on the life stories of Ammar and Vin. Following this, it looks at the experiences of born-Muslims who did not regard religion as playing a significant role in their childhood. The section discusses the experiences of Naveed, Ahmed and Mohammad, all born-Muslims of South Asian origin who felt that religion was not an important part of childhood in their families.

Ammar²², a Black Caribbean convert to Islam, was forty-four years old and lived in South London.

I had a basis of: this is God, you have to pray. Certainly not in the traditional sense of Sunday school and stuff like that. Although I did go to Sunday school a few times but that was a result of my friendship with my neighbours who used to go and they brought me along. But it certainly wasn't something that my mum was saying 'Look, this is what you need to do.' She was very much 'You need to find your own way. This is what is out there and I believe in God and I pray to him all the time and this is how I deal with my worship.'

Similarly, Vin²³, a mixed race (Black Caribbean and Indian), was brought up as a Rastafarian; he explained the importance of religion during his childhood as a belief in a higher power or a god. Vin only spoke about his parent's religion when he was explaining his conversion. His emphasis on spiritualism, a belief in God and a curiosity about all religions during Religious Education in school were related to his conversion narrative.

I've always been spiritual. Like my parents are both Rasta, so it's like orthodox Christianity, and I was raised like with the Bible and all of that stuff. But I was always took interest in the creator in terms of the most high or a higher source or higher being and God, if you will. And for me, it was like, I didn't feel like I had a connection, I didn't feel like anything was real. Even though I still believed, I would never agree with like the Big Bang or anything like that. I always believed in the higher source

²² Ammar, 44, Black Caribbean, Salafi (convert), conviction for armed robbery, longest prison term: 8 years.

²³ Vin, age 21, Mixed race, convert, conviction for burglary, longest prison term: 15 months.

because I know these things. But I wasn't sure like where I belong or where I stand. I just knew that there was God.

This sense of belonging was not related to the degree of religious practise in childhood. Some of the born-Muslims who had religious teaching on and off during their childhood expressed a similar casual adherence to religion in childhood. This was true for four of the born-Muslims: Ahmed, Mohammad, Naveed and Hameed. These participants had a more formal religious upbringing in which they learnt religious rituals and teachings. However, each of these participants felt a lack of connection to their understanding of religion during childhood. All these participants described later changes in which they shifted their understanding of religion at a later stage in their life.

Mohammad²⁴, a second generation British Pakistani from London, described how during childhood there were long periods in which religious practise was completely missing in his life. However, he recalled short periods in his childhood when religion became important for his mother; this was around the death of his maternal grandparents.

Erm not so much, erm not really at all until my grandma and grandparents died from my mum's side and that was when we were about 5, 6, 7 years old, me I was about 5, 6, 7 years old. My mum started praying, started encouraging us to pray, we read Qur'an from around that age as well. We finished the Qur'an all four of us. Yeah with mum at home and then was a big gap. My mum always tried to encourage us to pray and read Qur'an and do things good.

Similarly Naveed²⁵ also did not emphasise the importance of religious learning or belonging during his childhood.

'My father was very strict, he was very academic, he believed that everything was about our education. He was very secularist, he wasn't very much into religion. My Mum was very much into religion but she was more cultural Pakistani mother'.

²⁴ Mohammad, 33, British Pakistan, Sunni, conviction for armed robbery and drugs, longest prison term: 3 years.

²⁵ Naveed, age 40, British Pakistani, born-Muslim, conviction for murder, longest prison term: 17 years.

Ahmed²⁶, a British Bangladeshi participant, also felt that his religious education was limited. Even though his parents were religious, they prioritised his education in school as they wanted him to do well and become established in a professional career. Ahmed described religion during his childhood as a mixture of religious rituals that he did not understand and as an arbitrary set of rules that his parents used to set restrictions on what he was allowed to do. While he did not completely understand the significance of religious rituals or the logic behind his parent's restrictions, he did not think about it much and accepted both as a part of his life.

This discussion of religion as a belief in a higher power concludes the section on religious learning during childhood. In this section I focused on the different ways in which religious learning and ritual was important for participants. I discussed the significance of religious kinship communities and spiritual sense-making as two important aspects of religious learning and connection during childhood. I now move on to discuss the significance of critical events during childhood which can have an enduring effect on life chances. These critical events are not related to religious affiliation: rather they are regarded as critical turning points in childhood which can adversely affect the life chances for children, usually from socioeconomically deprived backgrounds. These significant childhood events were common to both born-Muslims and converts.

4.2. Belonging and exclusion: Life story accounts

Life course research in criminology focuses on important turning points in early childhood that can have a significant influence on individuals' identities. Turning points are 'critical events' that have an overwhelming influence on the life course and are regarded as particularly useful in understanding the strengthening of patterns of behaviour along with changes in trajectories. Turning points are considered crucial in understanding the pathways towards crime and persistent offending. Life course studies within criminology have tended to work with large data sets of quantitative research material in which patterns across the sample are identified. Attempts to understand the material conditions that lead to crime have fallen short of identifying causal factors that can explain involvement in crime (Sampson and

²⁶ Ahmed, age 45, British Bangladeshi, Sunni, conviction for sex with underage girl, longest prison term: 2 years.

Laub, 2001; Laub, 2003; Sampson, 2005). This is inevitable as social action is interactional, relational and produced in a particular situational context.

This research outlines in detail this social context and its influence on the participants by examining participants' description of critical childhood events and the longer-term changes these brought about in their relationships, attitudes and behaviours. This research focuses on affective changes in the lives of the individuals following such critical events. These affective changes, particularly when linked to understanding of belonging and exclusion, can play a crucial role in influencing identity and social action. Criminological research also prioritises the influence of emotions on involvement in crime and motivations for offending (De Haan and Loader, 2002). The research contextualises affective changes by examining the broader situational context and social responses to these events by key social actors and institutions. These social dynamics are important in understanding the longer-term significance of these events on the lives of the participants.

In talking of childhood, a lot of the participants described traumatic events that they experienced at a very young age. These events were considered critical in influencing the life trajectory and identity of the participants. As discussed earlier, these life events are considered important regardless of religious affiliation or ethnic background in adversely influencing life chances. I start by looking at critical events in the family lives of participants, then I discuss significant experiences in school, and finally I focus on the neighbourhood as an important site which can influence the trajectory of individual lives.

4.21. Family

For a significant number of participants, memories of childhood pivoted on critical events within their family that were significant in changing the dynamics within their family lives. Participants focused on experiences of parental divorce; sexual and domestic abuse; economic deprivation; authoritarian or absent parent; and the loss of significant relationships due to illness or death as important family circumstances and events that had an impact on their lives. These events were significant as they had an impact on the emotional state of

participants at a young age. Participants describe being overwhelmed with feelings of anger, sadness, loss, shame and confusion due to these experiences.

For six of the participants²⁷, their parents' divorce was a critical event after which their life changed dramatically. For Ammar, Naveed and Ali, their lives in a nuclear family were tainted by memories of witnessing their mother as a victim of domestic abuse at the hands of their father. Ammar and Mohammad were victims of sexual abuse, while Zulfikar and Waqar lost siblings due to illness during early childhood.

| Critical Events | Number of participants |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Parental divorce | 6 |
| Sexual abuse | 2 |
| Physical abuse | 3 |
| Authoritarian parenting | 6 |
| Death of close family member | 2 |

This section focuses on the complex interplay of personal difficulties and affective changes in the childhood of Vin, a mixed race (Black Caribbean and Indian) convert from North London, and Ammar, a Black Caribbean convert, who experienced parental divorce at different ages during their childhood. Their experiences in a single parent household resonate with the other four participants who similarly experienced parental divorce during childhood.

Ammar started the recollection of his life from the age of six; the first significant event he remembered was his parents' divorce. The divorce led to changes in his family life, which led to changes in his relationship with his parents, his behaviour and friendships.

My mum separated from my dad at six, I was six years old. She had very valid reasons as to why she'd made that choice and I stand behind her for making the choice that she did, she had to. However, what happened was, as I was a single child. I was an only child, as well, so that kind of made the matter even more complicated in the respect that there weren't any other siblings for me to take any influence from. So, I was taking all of my influence outside from the home. So, by the time I got to seven,

²⁷ Ammar, Ali, Steve, Vin, Mohammad and Hameed

eight, nine years old, everything was about my friends, because those were the bonds that I was developing. So, you're very impressionable at that age, and you don't have anything to benchmark it against. You don't have a really, really well-behaved brother or sister, you know, it's just you.

Although Ammar's mother presented a positive role model for him, as a child he rejected her influence. He thinks that he valued a male role model more and since he did not have a close male model in his home, he turned to peer relationships to fill this gap.

'She was very creative, and during the period of my upbringing I mean she was extremely cultured, she gave me everything that I needed, really, in order for me to develop. But I, in many ways rejected it or took it on at a subliminal level'.

As he grew older, Ammar's became more and more disruptive at home. His mother found it hard to deal with him and he was sent to care homes several times as a child. For Ammar, this meant he had two homes: he could spend time in care homes and he always had the option to return to his mother when he wanted. This combination of homes provided a great sense of freedom and excitement for Ammar. It was also a source of instability. Another critical event in his childhood was when he became a victim of sexual abuse in one of these hostels. Ammar felt that this instability had an effect on his behaviour and led him to misbehave even more to seek attention both at home and in his school.

So what I would do is, I was, I had a level of freedom which was really cool, so I was one of the cool kids 'cause I could kind of come out play when I wanted to, I could you know, there were times when, and I had, you know I'd been in these children home but I'd just run away from there, go back home, or I'd be in these children homes, but I'd going back home having lunch there with my friends, but then going back to this place cause it was all very close by. So, I mean, and then I would get new clothes from the children's home, new clothes from my mum, then go and see my dad, go and get money, so it was, I dunno, it was a strange situation, but it was, it worked for me as a 10 year old, 11 year old, 12 year old, it was working for me. But what was happening as a result of not having that stability and kind of being around is I took on a persona of being a bit of the class jester, yeah, that's probably the best term I could use.

Like Ammar, Vin (mixed race- Indian and black Caribbean) described his parent's divorce and the emotional turmoil this caused in his life as his most significant childhood experience. Vin's parents divorced when he was five years old. He and his brothers did not get along with his mother's new partner. After a particularly difficult argument, his mother turned him out of the house. He was eleven at the time. Vin was too young to live on his own so he went to live with his father. Despite his problems with his mother's partner, his memories of his time with his mother were happy. He was part of a large family with two older brothers and two younger sisters. He was well looked after, and his mother was quite protective of him. His school was close to his house and his mother used to drive him to school. Clothes, food and anything else he needed were provided for him. Vin's life with his father was in stark contrast to this and he really struggled to adjust to his new circumstances. Vin described the move from his mother's home to live with his father as the end of his childhood.

Vin's father lived in shared accommodation. He was recovering from surgery and had a disability. The initial few months were the most difficult for Vin; as he struggled to adapt to the changes in his life, his behaviour started changing. He started behaving aggressively with students and staff in school and he became more disruptive as well.

But yeah, my life changed, because now, because my dad finds it difficult to support me and I'm on the street, I'm going to and from the school. You know, my dad didn't have money to give me. Now I need money because my mum doesn't make much, and now I need money, but he didn't have money to give me, so I had to apply for that, free school dinners, free school meals, but it takes time, sometimes it doesn't fill me up or I don't eat what they have to...So it was difficult for me. I wasn't living correctly. So, my habits, you know, and anybody would know, for a child at such a young age to go through certain things like stress, its' going to have an immediate impact on their behaviour. And that's what happened to me. I started doing irrational things that was uncharacteristic of me, like stealing from shops. Just little canned drinks, little sweets, chocolates, little kids--maybe I was hungry, I didn't have breakfast in the morning, or I needed some energy, or I was thirsty. I had no money, I had no lunchbox, I had nothing. Little things like that, you know. Getting wound up easily. Being angry in school. Started getting a bit aggressive to children. Aggressive towards staff. Basically, my personal life just impacted hugely on school and

everything. Yeah, so I finished primary school and managed to just about finish, they was gonna expel me because my behaviour deteriorated that badly in the period of time I was moving out of my mum's house.

Parental divorce was accompanied by economic hardship, insecure accommodation and distancing in the relationship between the participant and both parents. Participants either lost contact with their father or had limited contact after divorce. Although most of the participants lived with their mother after their parents' divorce, their relationship became strained due to increased financial responsibilities on the mother. A new partner was also a source of tension that could cause distancing in the relationship between the mother and child. These strains were expressed as behavioural changes and increased interaction outside the home, usually in the neighbourhood, and disruptive behaviour in school. Ali, Mohammad, Hameed and Steve also described such changes in their lives following parental divorce.

Authoritarian, harsh parenting is another established risk factor which can lead to delinquency and crime (Thompson, Hollis and Richards, 2003; Farrington et al., 2015). This was a factor in the childhood experiences of Ahmed, a born Muslim of British Bangladeshi origin. He was forty-five years old and lived in North London. His early childhood was characterised by harsh authoritarian parenting in which he viewed his parents as distant but strict on discipline. There was a strong emphasis on religious and academic education. Ahmed described his parents, particularly his father, as very authoritarian. The very strict control that Ahmed's parents exercised over his life was something he referenced throughout the story.

Mum was very military in that approach even to our punishments if one of you done wrong you didn't grass up the others because you'd get into twice as much trouble but if you didn't grass up you all stood up in a line and you all got punished so it didn't matter who done wrong, we all got punished so we just stood there and took it 'okay mum.' But yeah my dad didn't punish us as much that's because he wasn't around as much but when he did, we knew we was being punished it was a lot harder. With mum it's like stand in the corner or hold your ears and what we call the squats nowadays yeah do 50 of those. It was painful at the time but it was okay whereas with my dad it was like real discipline you know stick out your hand you're going to a get

a whip because you done it wrong erm but usually for my dad to do that we would have had to do something really, really bad.

Along with this, the lack of explanation or discussion about family decisions and rules was another theme that emerged quite strongly throughout Ahmed's life story. He had a lot of anger and resentment about this.

I remember the only thing was that all my mates used to go around each other's house and I never did and parents wouldn't allow me. Found out later it's because wherever you go somewhere you know you join in with the food and things and I only eat halal food they might not. They might not realise that so I might eat something I'm not supposed to. Apparently, that was the reason, but at the time it wasn't explained. It was just 'nope you're not going; nope you're not going so yeah.

Ahmed and his family lived in a one-bedroom apartment on top of his father's takeaway restaurant. He had few memories of his father from his childhood. His father worked very long hours and the family rarely got to see him.

Don't remember seeing much of my dad before 1983 erm not because, it's just that he used to work every hour God gave him. He'd go and go pull a double shift at the Savoy, come home see him for 10 minutes go down to his restaurant and then dunno what time he got back I was asleep by the time he came up. When I got ready to go to school he was still asleep, when I got home he wasn't there.

Similarly, long working hours and strict discipline in the home was also a theme in the childhood experiences of Rahim, a British Pakistani who was born and brought up in a small town in the North of England. Rahim's father started work in the paper mills when he first arrived in England. When the mills shut down, his father started driving taxis. His mother worked from home, sewing clothes for some of the clothing warehouses situated in the North. Although both his parents worked very long hours, money was always short in their home.

I'm nine, ten and I know my mum's telling me when I'm nine that 'I've sold my bangles yeah', when she was telling me that, she was crying, she was crying that time

I remember. So, you know you don't have to be told it's automatic that's pressure. You have to do well. But that's the problem I have for some reason when I look back I've got pressure but I'm not doing anything about it do you understand? That's what I had, I always was aware, always had the pressure but at the same time I was probably not confident to do anything about it at the time as well probably.

Despite the enormous pressure put on Rahim by his parents, he felt his academic ability fell short of the expectations of his parents. This had created strong feelings of inadequacy, shame and guilt in him. This sense of guilt at letting down his parents and his feelings of inadequacy were a strong undercurrent throughout his story.

Abdullah, Immad, Imran and Naveed also spoke of their fathers as distant and authoritarian. They also described getting physical beatings from their fathers for any small transgressions. Participants who described their parents as authoritarian and cold, had a mixture of feelings which included feelings of inadequacy, shame, guilt, responsibility, rebellion and resentment. These feelings were linked to different forms of delinquent behaviour at different age stages.

Other critical events from family life in childhood also caused similar affective changes in participants. When Zulfikar (British Pakistani who grew up in Nottingham and was currently living in North London) was quite young, his mother developed a brain tumour which progressively got worse. By the time Zulfikar was thirteen, his mother was bedridden and his father had to quit work to care for her. Prior to his mother's illness, she worked as a nurse and his father worked in a bicycle factory. Zulfikar had four siblings. Three of his siblings died very young; he was not sure of the cause of death. His mother's ill health and his siblings' deaths in early childhood were his abiding childhood memories of family life. Waqar's sibling also died when he was five years old. He felt that the memory of his sister's death remained with him throughout his childhood.

In this section, I have examined critical events in the personal lives of participants in their early childhood that had an enduring impact on their identity. Several themes emerge as important. As discussed above, economic hardship and deprivation were significant in descriptions of early childhood. Parents were described as working hard to try to keep up with financial demands in usually difficult and precarious circumstances. In early childhood, economic hardship was described in terms of not having access to resources, such as food or

clothing, and inadequate attention from parents, due to long working hours. In nuclear families, both parents usually worked: the father had multiple jobs outside the home and worked extraordinarily long hours, while the mothers did more part time jobs from home, such as sewing, or were housewives. The stress of economic hardship was seen to influence parents' emotional and mental health and had an impact on parents' relationships with each other and their ability to do effective parenting (also in Elder, 2001).

As already discussed, many of the participants experienced the breakdown of their parents' marriage in their early childhood. This exacerbated economic hardship and further strained the participants' relationships with their parents, which had an impact on childhood outcomes such as relationship with peers, self-confidence and school performance. This loop of economic hardship, relationship strains and childhood outcomes became a reinforcing interactional process which created a cycle of emotional distress for both parents and the child, having a significant influence on childhood outcomes (see in Elder, 2001). This theme emerged consistently in all the life stories. The next section looks at the participants' experiences in school.

4.22. School

This section focuses on experiences of exclusion and mislabelling in school amongst participants who described traumatic events in early childhood. Ali, Ammar, Waqar, Mohammad, Hameed, Immad, Imran, Steve and Vin were all excluded from their school for different misdemeanours. Zulifikar and Naveed remember their school as a space of racist bullying and violent fighting amongst students. However, the rest of the sample – slightly less than half of the participants – described their school experiences as uneventful. A majority of participants left school with few or no GCSEs. Only four of the participants went on to university. This section uses the experiences of Vin, Waqar and Ali to draw attention to the impact of school exclusion on identity. It then moves on to look at the experiences of some of the participants who did not experience school exclusion and had positive memories of school.

Everyday interactions within social institutions such as schools act to reinforce the social hierarchies and fractures present within a society (Myers and Bhopal, 2017). Focusing on

these micro level everyday interactions highlights the ways in which ingrained forms of social exclusion or racism are perpetuated and maintained (Gillborn, 2006). Recent research suggests that the experiences of constant school exclusion, extended periods of time spent in seclusion units inside school, and the label of being troublesome, combine to create a school experience which almost prepares students for time in prison (Graham, 2014). These mechanisms highlight the meso-level influences present in the school environment which can lead to detrimental educational attainment and involvement in crime (Gillborn, 2008; Phillips, 2010).

Research has examined the relationship between school exclusion and criminal or anti-social behaviour (Gillborn, 2008; Graham, 2014). While it is not possible to form a causal link between school exclusion and criminality, changes to identity and lifestyle linked to school exclusion include a shift in peer groups from prosocial to anti-social peers, changes to routine, and family disruption. School exclusion can become a turning point which leads to a sense of exclusion from mainstream groups and society and the adoption of a deviant lifestyle. This section looks at the impact of such perceived negative interactions on the situated identities of some of the research participants. It highlights the intersection of class, race and gender in the creation of experiences of social exclusion and their longer-term impact on self-identity.

Waqar²⁸, a Somali born Muslim from London, started experiencing problems in school from a young age. His main memory of school was the extensive hours he spent in the seclusion unit. Waqar had to earn back his place in the main classroom through good behaviour. He could earn back his place a lesson at a time. If he was involved in an incident, he was immediately sent back to the seclusion unit. For Waqar, constant exclusion meant that he spent his school life on the margins of school. He spent most of his day in the seclusion unit and was only allowed outside for a short period of time.

So, you would end up seeing each other when you finish, when you come to the playground. That's when the most incidents happened, when they let us out, and you ain't been out for so long, you're just like, if you want to do anything.

²⁸ Waqar, age 21, African- Somali, born Muslim, conviction for drug dealing and robbery, longest prison term: 11 months.

This was especially relevant for his secondary school experience as he remembers being in segregation for most of his time in school. Waqar compared the seclusion unit in his school to the education rooms inside prison. His school routine mirrored prison routine in a lot of ways.

They had a thing called LSBC, like learners with poor behaviour unit, and they had me there.... It's so mad, because the windows actually had bars in it. And we're kids at the time, so it was like. And I have been to Jo (jail) and I've seen classrooms in that are exactly the same as that. I didn't know that at that time. So I seen the exact same thing.

Waqar regarded his time excluded from mainstream schooling as a waste of time. He felt that constant exclusion from mainstream schooling meant that he was unable to get a chance to explore his academic potential. Vin (mixed race) and Ali (Irish), who were similarly excluded, found the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) a better environment in which they had some support to engage with their studies. Ali described his experience in his Irish Catholic primary school in South London as unhappy and strained. His experience in school, highlights the multiplicity of factors that influence belonging and insider/outsider status. Although both Ali's parents were Irish Catholic and his family was well known within the Irish Catholic community that predominantly attended his school, his situation in school was precarious. Ali's mother had attended the same school as him. The head teacher remembered his mother who had struggled in school because of her dyslexia. Ali felt he was labelled as a problem child because of the head teacher's dislike of his mother. Her dislike for his mother may also have been influenced by the fact that Ali's parents were divorced, and his mother was in a lesbian relationship. Both divorce and homosexuality would be in contradiction with Catholic beliefs and may have been a source of stigma for Ali growing up. Thus, unlike his mother, even though Ali was good at subjects that involved reading, he did not get much of a chance to explore his academic potential. He was constantly involved in fights and excluded from mainstream education.

I wasn't really good in school. I had a lot of temper problems. I've read school reports that I would get so angry I would pull my own hair scratch my own face when I was very, very young. erm and I was always fighting in school. When I was really young I can't remember just stupidity really... So they started taking me out when I was

around, it all around the same age funnily enough, like seven, eight, nine. They started taking me out of school twice a week and taking me to a, what I call, I don't know if that's the right terminology, but a behavioural centre. Where it was a place for me to try to express myself and deal with my anger... And you know the headmistress she was a nun in my junior school she was a nun and she didn't like our family. She had a problem with my mum. My mum used to go to the same school and she had a problem with my mum. 'Typical Connie' she'd say. Cause my mum's name is Connie. Oh, you're from that family. And my mum ended up arguing with her 'You can't blame him for my mistakes'. Cause my mum's dyslexic and back then it wasn't really recognised you were just classed as a dunce. Erm but it was for totally different reasons...

In contrast to Waqar and Ali who had problems in school from a young age, Vin²⁹ described his first few years at primary school as happy and settled. He was very good in his studies and was an outstanding student. In his years in primary school, his personal life was complicated by parental divorce, the breakdown of his relationship with his mother, and the strained circumstances he found himself in when living with his father who was disabled and struggling to look after him properly. These difficult circumstances influenced his behaviour in school, which started deteriorating. The complex strains in his personal life were not taken into account in the school's understanding of Vin's deteriorating behaviour and the sudden fall in his academic performance. Rather, as Vin described it, he was seen as having a 'mental condition', a behavioural or personality issue. In seeing his behaviour as a 'behavioural flaw' rather than a response to difficult personal circumstances, the school's response increased Vin's frustration and social isolation.

I've always been naturally gifted and talented. Got top results in my sets without even revision. No revision, got top results. There was always like some question to my personality or my behaviour or my mental conditions from young, because even though I was so intelligent, I used to get myself in trouble. I wouldn't say I was particularly naughty, I was just a bit mischievous, not bad and all that. Just little things like getting work being unchallenging for me. I complete work first before any of the class, and then I'd get bored, so I'm a bit mischievous. I've got a strong

personality, I wear my heart on my sleeve, I've always been like this from young. I'm an outgoing person, I can be friendly as well, mingle with people. I'm not self-contained. So, all of these things, it's like the schools, and there's a pattern that continued through to high school. The schools were aware of my academic abilities, but they're also aware of the flaws, the behavioural flaws. And after all that, the system, even though growing up in my life, you know fast forward ten, fifteen years I ended up going to prison and stuff. I feel like all of this, all of my past is a contributing factor to it, because teachers say stuff to you like, 'Oh yeah you're gonna go prison when you're older' and stuff like that. Which is not good, and they shouldn't do. But I mean, from young, like I said, and it carried on into high school, they focused more on the negative than on the positive. Whereas if they'd done vice versa, I think I would've prospered, I would have propelled much faster and further in life. But it's like, it's like it was set up for me to fail.

Vin's experience of school changed significantly after he became involved in a violent incident outside his school for which he was arrested. He was thirteen years old at the time of this incident. Although Vin was not convicted for his involvement in this event, his arrest caused some people in his school to view him differently: they started avoiding him. His mother withdrew him from school as the negative attitude of some of the students and teachers also extended to his younger sister. After his withdrawal from school Vin had even more time to spend on the road and he became more drawn to the gangs that operated there. Following his arrest, Vin also came onto the police's radar; after this he was regularly stopped by the them. Vin describes this incident and the response to it as a turning point in his life. Up to this point, he described himself as mischievous and after this he became involved in serious crimes. He embraced the street as the main focus of his life.

But that changed my life at that point. Because it was like the first time I'm going to court, being involved in police, everything. My little sister goes to the school as well. So where I still have friends there, and I still have her there, sometimes I'll go to pick her up or meet my friends, it's horrible. People see me, they know I'm innocent so they're fine. Certain people they see me, they're horrified, they cross the road. Some people call me horrible names. You know, 'murderer', other horrible names that I don't even want to go into. I know I was innocent, otherwise I wouldn't be here today. I'd still be in prison right now if I deserved it. But after that, it's like police began to

harass me. People began to treat me differently in terms of peers. Some better, maybe they look up to me, maybe they're happy about what happened, maybe they fear it. And other people started disliking me but they believed the rumours, I don't know.

For Vin the school's response to his initial misbehaviour, his arrest and the changes it caused in the way he was perceived in school were linked to Vin was excluded from his next school for selling weed. After his exclusion from secondary school, Vin started attending a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). The staff at this unit were more supportive and he managed to complete his GCSEs. His results were not as good as he had been expected. Vin felt this was because of all the disruption to his schooling.

If I had the opportunity to go to the Pupil Referral Unit from Year 7 to Year 11, I would have done it. Because in mainstream school, I'm not saying this is for me specially, no, but there's certain individuals that need certain support and specialist staff involved, and they don't get that, and then you get failed. In PRU, I hardly used to get in trouble. The support I had was amazing: mentors, people to talk to, focus learning, classes were smaller--about 6, 7, 8 people, 9 max in the class. So you can concentrate so much more, you're getting a lot more work done, you're more enthusiastic, you know. People there have got similar problems to you, so you can talk more, people show you a lot more attention, they focus on you, rather than in being in school and you're just one, you know, one fish out of the school, you know what I mean?

Not all participants received a harsh response from their school to their deteriorating behaviour. Like some of the other participants, Naveed (British Pakistani) had trouble controlling his anger. His father was abusive at home and this abuse had an impact on Naveed's emotional state. He describes himself as reclusive along with having bouts of uncontrolled anger. Naveed was involved in a violent fight during his time at primary school. His teacher's reaction was different to the ones described by the other participants. She helped Naveed manage the emotional turmoil that had led to his outburst. Naveed did not mention any further altercations with teachers in his primary or secondary years.

'So, first school was okay, middle school was okay. Although I had a few times when I did get angry, I remember, once I got in a fight and the teacher, I remember her

saying to me, “calm down,” it took about five of them to calm me down then the teacher said to me, “It’s okay to cry.” And I remember crying and she said, ‘It’s healthy to cry and let it out’. So I remember I learned that’.

Naveed’s secondary school however, was at quite a distance from his house. He did not know any of the children in his school. They were from different neighbourhoods and he did not fit in with any of the groups in his school. Naveed was bullied and picked on in school. He stopped going to school to avoid being bullied. Missing school had an effect on his grades and he left school with no GCSEs.

So, in my middle school I was actually top of the class in Maths and English, I was very intelligent but when it came to that I missed out so much in education because you know I was being bullied and I didn’t want to go to school. So you know I missed out a lot of education. So that’s kind of what happened in school and it was pretty much that. It wasn’t even and I can’t even say specific instances but I can say that that’s what it was like.

These experiences of school bullying are similar to Zulifikar’s (British Pakistani) description of his primary and secondary school.

[School] was just predominately White people, Black people and Asian people. And they used to get into lots of fights at school, it was one of those kind of schools where people used to fight all the time in the playground... and so I used to, there wasn’t very much education, we used to go on a lot of school trips and we used to play cricket in the field and football, and we just used to get into fights all the time, you know? It was one of those kind of schools... just, just because we were kids we didn’t really know why we were fighting, we were just fighting. We just used to fight a lot and I used to get into quite a lot of fights at school.

For Zulfikar, experience of racist bullying outside his school was one of the triggers which led to his violent and aggressive behaviour.

I can remember people waiting outside the school when the school was finished and they were with their dads and their mums and their granddads was there as well and

they'd encourage their kids to fight me. They were saying "hit him" yeah, the elders they'll have their dogs there as well, like their big dogs proper zalem kutheh (cruel dogs) kind of things you know, and then I'd have to fight them there... Sometimes my granddad would come to pick us up, my granddad was like an army person, he was like a big character— he's passed away now— and he'd tell me "fight them, tell them fight them they're calling you racist words." So I did, I used to fight them and you know sometimes that was the only way to get some respect or get them to stop saying what they're saying or get them to back off at school you know yeah. Fighting became a normal thing to me, it was an everyday thing.

Zulfikar became part of a gang in order to protect himself from the bullying. Through his involvement with the gang, he started taking class A drugs and became involved in car theft and burglaries.

Yeah, there was a gang of us. There was a gang of about 15 Asians and we used to go around together all over the place you know. We just used to around messing about with people, smoking weed you know taking things from shops, robbing stuff you know that kind of stuff, robbing people you know.

Ahmed, Abdullah and Rahim described their school experience as happy and positive. They had pleasant memories of their time in school.

The next section looks at the importance of local neighbourhood influences on the identity of participants in childhood.

4.23. Neighbourhood

The neighbourhood was an important social space for participants as they grew older and gained independence. Participants described their neighbourhoods as spaces of freedom where they were free from the constraints of their parents and school's rules. The neighbourhood therefore represented a space of thrill, excitement, opportunity and friendship. Neighbourhoods were also liminal spaces where participants interacted with peers from diverse class, ethnic and social backgrounds. This diversity was an everyday part of life for

all of the participants. Back (1996) suggests that neighbourhood affinity, what he calls 'neighbourhood nationalism', is an important influence on identity. This affinity to a local area and shared public space creates syncretic spaces in which youth explore, negotiate and develop new forms of identities that are across ethnic, race and class lines. This section looks at the different descriptions of neighbourhood provided by participants and draws attention to the variegated experience of youth, usually treated as a structurally determined and homogenous entity (Alexander, 1996).

For participants who described their home life as chaotic and lonely, their neighbourhood became the most important social space from a young age. On the one hand, the neighbourhood was a place of cultural richness, friendship and freedom. On the other, it was a place where it was easy to get drawn into criminal activities such as drug taking and usually selling, as well as burglaries, shoplifting, gang violence and street robberies. The thrill of recently received independence and the 'seductions of crime' allowed for an escape from the mundanity of everyday life (Muncie, 2004; Back, 2013). Social bonds and status in the neighbourhood were based on fitting in with peers, being open to taking risks, and displaying a strong masculinity by standing up for yourself in any violent altercation.

Vin (mixed race) described how life in his neighbourhood became an alternative to the relationships he lost after leaving his mother's house. His father encouraged him to spend time outside playing rather than staying indoors in the one room they shared. This was a new experience for Vin, as he had been very sheltered by his mother, and he enjoyed his new-found freedom. However, being out on the streets on his own meant he had to learn to look out for and protect himself. Learning to fight to defend himself in his neighbourhood became a turning point in his life. Vin became quite close to his half-brother who helped him to learn how to survive on the streets on his own. This new relationship with his older half-brother became quite significant for Vin.

People probably thinking, 'He's a new face', try to intimidate me. Ended up getting into like, not fights but--I couldn't, I didn't know how to fight, because I'd never, you know, being in school and hitting someone is different than actually having a fight and just hitting someone. But when someone's hitting you back, it's a fight and I didn't know how to be in a fight at that time and defend myself? So, I told my dad, I came, I got beat up one day, I came inside--not beat up, but I lost, and I came, so I told my

dad what happened. He, my dad now has got a son with another woman who basically is not my mum's child. So, I've got another sibling who I didn't grow up with, which I'm now aware of. So now, he introduced me to my brother, I started seeing my brother... He's five years senior to me. And he taught me, he started coming with me sometimes, taught me how to fight, look after myself. I went back to these boys, we had another fight and this time I won. So, it's like, that was the first, that was a turning point for me on the road. I said to myself, 'I'm never going to lose again. No one is going to pick on me ever again'.

'On the road' and life 'on the streets' as used in Vin's story outline the importance of neighbourhood peer relationships and the norms and values learnt in these interactions as important in influencing the identity of young people in urban neighbourhoods. These interactions are at the fringes of street crimes and gangs but can lead to trajectories into crime (Briggs, 2010).

If you fast forward a year later, about 13 years old, probably coming to the end of Year 7, towards the beginning of Year 8, obviously I started developing you know, teenage, you start developing as a teen—puberty and all of this stuff. I started getting into girls and music, I started growing up more, becoming more hard core. And then I was very popular in school and stuff. But my behaviour was still, I started changing, I started changing from this innocent boy that I used to be, into what everyone else wanted me to be. And it happened so fast. Because I didn't have my brothers around me anymore to necessarily look up to in terms of guidance or direction or inspiration. It was more like, I'm by myself doing me. And I started, you know, just trying, just wanting to be someone, just wanting to feel, I don't know, accepted, important maybe.

Like Vin, an important influence on Ammar's (Black Caribbean) life was the neighbourhood he grew up in. From the age of seven, Ammar remembers going out and playing with friends on his own at quite a distance from his home. His mother moved around quite a bit when Ammar was young; every new place they moved to, Ammar would learn to make friends and explore the local area. When Ammar was eight, he was arrested for the first time. The police caught Ammar and his friend while they were playing in his school: they had set some things on fire to create a sort of camp fire. For him this first incident was a catalyst which led to

more and more interactions with police, youth services and time in and out of care homes and secure youth hostels. Ammar's first interaction with the criminal justice system and the labelling of his behaviour as criminal had a profound effect on his identity. The mixture of shame and excitement that was related to this label became an important part of Ammar's identity. It also meant that he was on the police radar: after that, any small infraction or misbehaviour was just added on to his record.

'Once we came down to London, I was getting picked up by those guys every couple of weeks, and it was the same officers, they'd see you, and I just think, I think back to that and I think they knew clearly the impact that would have and it was stuff you didn't need to be arrested for, you know things that could have been mediated quite easily, you know things that you would expect really the local bobby to come and kind of bring you to your front door, holding you by your ear and say 'oi, have a word with him'. But it wasn't that, it was you know straight to the police station, arrested, charged, you know call the family, very disrespectful to the family when they came, you know that was my biggest challenge was how much I embarrassed my mum.'

Following his arrest, he and his mother moved to South London. His neighbourhood in South London became his permanent home and was an important influence on Ammar's identity. It was a deprived neighbourhood but there was a vibrant culture of music and art, along with opportunities to make money in illicit ways through robberies, burglaries and drug dealing. Ammar fitted in very well with this. There were however parts of his neighbourhood that he felt were unavailable to him: the more affluent parts. This mixture of cultural richness but easy access to drugs, economic deprivation, but opportunity to make money through illicit means made it easy for Ammar to get involved in crime from a young age.

'It was (name of area), you know, drugs were being sold quite openly on the street. It was a very cool kind of area as well. You had all the kind of skinheads and rock guys and the reggae kind of movement, all very inter combined. All the creative types that were creating that music, artists come and got in, it was just a very vibrant place to be in. And I was right in the middle of all that, amongst a group of people who were taking their pick. We'd walk a few streets and there were six storey £20 million houses and I developed friendships with kids from those houses. So it was just such a mix of abject poverty and just huge amounts of cold piece wealth, and everything in

between. So there was this on one hand not having anything and seeing all this and almost being there to touch it and experience it by being within those houses, you know.

Ammar described his first time in prison at the age of fourteen as thrilling and exciting. His identity was closely linked to the credibility he had in his neighbourhood due to his involvement in violence and crime. From a young age, he had been in secure units due to his involvement in burglary and crime. He had managed to escape from these secure hostels to return to his neighbourhood. These experiences had increased his standing in his neighbourhood. After a childhood spent in secure units and care homes, prison seemed to be the next logical stage and he was excited and looking forward to finally going to prison.

‘I got arrested for this case – it was a robbery – I was like ‘Wow I’m going to prison’, and I remember that day because my pants, my trousers, my jeans at the time were covered in blood and that was a result of my friend who was arrested with me, Jamie Mayor, they smashed his head open and then they threw him into the car and his head was on my lap, so his head was bleeding onto my lap and I remember just thinking how good that’d look you know once I was in prison, it was really, this is a 15-year-old kid, I was like “yeah I’m going to prison, I’m covered in blood” but it was a bit, it’s sad really to think that I actually thought there was a huge amount of credibility that is gonna be attached to that’.

A few of the participants described their neighbourhoods as racist. These participants were either fearful of venturing out into their neighbourhood on their own or were involved in fights from a young age. Ilyas (British Pakistani) grew up hearing about his older brothers being the victims of racist attacks in his area. His neighbourhood was quite diverse: there were many other South Asian Indian and Sikh children in his school. They formed a gang to protect themselves from racist attacks. Ilyas became involved in crime through this gang. He was arrested at the age of twelve for vandalism but was let off without a charge. This was his first interaction with the police.

When we was young, very young, I got elder brothers, then, it was, the area we lived in was a very racist area. Very, very racist at that time and we experienced a lot of that from a young age. Watching my elder brothers getting beaten up and bloodied by

elder white people and so as we grew older then obviously, the youngsters, our friends, my age group, we got to the age of like 13, 14, we got, we got to that age where we weren't having, we weren't gonna take that - what our elder brothers took. So, we used to retaliate back and I think from there, that's where we formed a gang. That's what, the reason was for forming a gang, was for protection but then that same gang from there, we were all school friends so it was, it was a mixed community as well where Coventry, like up here there's Pakistani but Coventry it was mixed, so you got a lot of Hindus, you got a lot of Sikhs. So, we, it's more diverse so we grew up with Sikh, my best friends who I grew up with were Sikhs, you know? Yeah like Muslims and Sikhs, you know we just grew— we never had none of that problem as, like certain areas they do. And then from there it just slowly carried on as in you know, you start doing crime and doing bad things as you do, and then unfortunately it progressed from there.

Rahim and Ahmed were discouraged from playing outside in their neighbourhood by their parents. This restriction was justified in religious terms, where their parents felt that mixing with white kids would lead to bad habits such as drinking alcohol or eating non-halal food. Rahim lived in a predominantly white neighbourhood. He did not feel comfortable playing outside in his neighbourhood as he was attacked a few times. His mother was also over protective: she had moved away from the Asian area as she was afraid that Rahim would become distracted from his studies through making the wrong kind of friends. She also did not want Rahim to make friends with white children in his neighbourhood. Rahim was quite lonely during his childhood.

‘Like I said my parents especially my mum she was quite strong minded and she was like, at that time my mum was always like you know, if you spend time amongst the community too much the kids you know, I've got a lot of friends of my age who probably did get to no good. You find you know you get good people as well that— I've got lots of good friends as well. My mum was worried that you know you have to move further away so less attraction with the children and you know the children, so over there we were a bit closed off but fine. We had no social life because it's funny really. ‘You can't spend time with Pakistanis’ okay fine, not spend time with Pakistanis but can't— but then ‘you couldn't play with no gorehs (white)’ like but then when you go to a gora (white) area you can't play with goreh (white) kids cause

they're crazy or they're naughty, they go out robbing you, they get up to no good, they stay out until late. So really it worked out you know we didn't have no friends till you was sixteen. You'd have friends at school and cousins maybe relatives coming down if you had to go and with someone that's fine, but I don't think I ever went outside my house and knocked on someone's door to play with if you know what I mean. If we had to go to another area to play something like football, but no in our area we didn't. There were a lot of young people but they were all English and you know that was a rough neighbourhood as well you know.'

For Rahim, this racism was a common occurrence in that time period.

Yeah, you know I'll have to tone it down but you get reminded that you're a Paki yeah they swear at you whenever you know, even your parents you know, your mum they'll be swearing. They were little kids and I'll be honest with you there's 4, 5 guys shouting 'what you gonna do?' erm you know and that's just how it was in them days; you know we used to walk down, and I'll be honest with you, after a bit living with goreh (white) sometimes you, it doesn't affect you after a bit, do you understand what I mean? It doesn't affect you, it just becomes normal, it's like you accept it for some reason and you have to otherwise you be stressed out all the time yeah, that's why one of the reasons why we didn't play with them as well you know 'cause it was rough. The only time the English people that we could speak to, you'd be feeling safe to speak to, were the ones that you recognised from school because if— you know what I mean? They would say 'Ah how you doing?' and then you know you feel a bit comfortable speaking to them 'cause they're from your school and you feel good. If they're not from your school you wouldn't dare, you know it's different you probably don't understand now but trust me 20, 30 years ago...'

Although Ahmed's parents also set restrictions on his interaction with non-Muslim children in his school and neighbourhood, he found both his school and neighbourhood in North London friendly and open spaces where he felt he fit in. He had difficulty understanding his parents' rules and restrictions. He abided by them in childhood but had quite a strong sense of resentment about these restrictions.

Yes, when I was growing up was it '75 onwards. I hear now at the time there was a lot of racial tensions in this country and there was a lot of violence, although I never saw any of it, I didn't see any of it. I didn't feel any of it so if there was, it wasn't where I was and that's all I know. Nobody made me feel like a foreigner, nobody made me feel different, yeah I still had people who didn't like me but that's because you're not friends with everybody in your class, I don't think anybody is, so no that wasn't a problem at all. I actually didn't experience any form of racism until after 9/11, even then it, it wasn't much, it was the odd couple of idiots and that was when I was going to the mosque, coming out of the mosque that was it. You know people can say everything they like about how you know they grew up with racism all around them although I can't, I haven't experienced it, known nothing about it.

Ali, a white Irish convert, also described the tension between him and his father due to his father's racist attitudes. While Ali lived in a diverse neighbourhood with his mother and had friends from diverse ethnic backgrounds, his father lived in a predominantly Irish Catholic area and did not want him to make friends with children from non-white backgrounds.

We're (father and him) very different people erm we're friends now, we talk, we have a laugh but we're very different people, different worlds erm my dad was a bit of a racist erm I always had black, Asian friends cause I'm from South London so we used to clash on that kind of level erm. It was mixture, it was a mixture, black and white for instance. A lot of my friends were Jamaican. Jamaican and Irish have a history of getting along with each other. They, you know, are quite close as a people, they don't have a problem with each other. And, yeah, you know. Because I had two narratives, I had --- my Dad's home area, which when I was young was very Irish, and, you know, I kinda used to go to the Irish pubs with my Dad. You know there were all kind of, well not IRA but you used to have all the people doing all the fun things and never think about that, and then I had my home area. You see all my friends, I had a mixture of friends. I had black friends, I never really had Asian friends, but there weren't really any Asians in my area. The Asians that were, were only Hindus and they kept themselves to themselves. So, yeah, I had a, I had quite a different outlook to life to my Dad.

Ali's description of the connection between Irish and Jamaican boys in his neighbourhood and Ilyas's description of the diversity in his gang by referencing different South Asian religions and ethnicities (such as Hindus, Pakistanis, Muslims and Sikhs) suggests that there are many different points of connections across ethnicities, along with boundaries that remain important between different ethnic groups (Back, 1996).

For a majority of participants, the neighbourhood was an important part of childhood as it was there that they built strong social bonds that gave them a sense of rootedness and belonging. This was particularly important if their sense of belonging was fractured in other social spaces such as their home and school. It was also a place where participants could overcome the economic deprivation they faced at home through involvement in crime. Participants' first sexual encounters and relationships were also in their neighbourhoods. This sense of connection was also important for participants who spent limited time outside their home due to parental restrictions. The few friendships these participants made in their school were still an important part of their childhood by giving them a sense of connection and safety in their neighbourhood. The syncretic nature of local neighbourhoods meant that conflicting ideas and thinking would come together and be modified and expressed in social interactions across class, age, ethnicity and gender lines.

Conclusion

Life story interviews provide insight into a 'whole story'. Retrospective accounts of past events provide important links for understanding participants current identity. Memories of childhood highlight the significance of being part of a religious kinship community. Along with this, spiritual sense-making allowed participants to disconnect from the material realities of their day to day existence and to see their lives as having a higher meaning or significance. Some of the respondents did not regard religion as significant during childhood. These participants had a belief in a supernatural being or god, but this was not a significant aspect of their life.

For participants who had a religious childhood, religion was an important source of belonging, sense-making and moral learning. It was however, one of many factors that influenced the relationships, values, attitudes and behaviour of the participants; stronger influences were experiences within the family, in their school and neighbourhood.

In this chapter I outlined significant events and experiences from childhood which had an impact on the participants' lives. I outline the importance of experiences of poverty, parental divorce, physical and sexual abuse, as well as parenting style as experiences within the family that participants felt contributed to their aggression and other forms of mischievous behaviour. A strongly negative response to these behaviours led to changes in school routine and their day to day lives. Along with this, the behaviour was usually labelled as individual personality or behavioural issues. This set these participants apart from the rest of their peers and led to increasingly worse behaviour and more involvement with social services, police and exclusion from mainstream schooling. Participants often escaped their difficult and strained relationships in their family and school through the freedom and connection they found in peer relationships in the neighbourhood.

Neighbourhoods became the location for belonging and trust. However, neighbourhoods were also the space through which participants became involved in crime. The close peer bonds formed in the neighbourhood required solidarity in dealing with violence and aggression, which was an important way of gaining status and control. The neighbourhood also provided opportunities to make money through drug dealing and petty crimes. This was attractive for participants whose family's financial circumstances were constrained.

In the next chapter I begin by focusing more on the influence of neighbourhood experiences in drawing respondents towards crime. A discussion on peer relationships and neighbourhood affiliations will help in maintaining the narratives of the different cases presented in the first empirical chapter. Along with this, in adolescence, peer relationships were the most significant influence and need to be foregrounded in the discussion of this age phase. I then return to the research questions and outline changes to religious identity that occurred in this age stage. I argue that for most respondents, religion became peripheral during adolescence.

5: Adolescence and early adulthood

The previous chapter discussed the different ways in which participants described the influence of religion during childhood. It examined participants experiences within their family, in school, and in their neighbourhood, up to the age that they were in school (sixteen years old). This chapter outlines influences on identity from mid-adolescence to adulthood (seventeen onwards). This age stage is regarded as the 'peak' age of offending behaviour. This chapter provides more details of the similarities between Muslim offenders and what are well established changes in adolescence that can make crime attractive within this age stage. Participants descriptions of how they became involved in crime, their use of techniques of neutralisation and their position of socio-economic disadvantage and low school achievement highlights the similarity between the experiences of the Muslim offenders in my study and what is already known about youth offending (Muncie, 2004).

In the first section I discuss the importance of peer relationships and local neighbourhood in the transition to adulthood for working class youth. Within this context I discuss the significance of territorial affiliation and violence in developing fraternal ties. I then look at the economic deprivations faced by participants, along with their desire for material goods as one of the factors influencing persistent involvement in crime. Finally, I outline the different motivations and influences for offending that displaced the opportunities presented by further education in the life story accounts of the participants who went to university. The reasons for offending were similar for both born-Muslims and converts, these were linked to their position of socioeconomic disadvantage. These explanations of involvement in crime are also similar to what is known of offending behaviour amongst youth within criminological research.

Building on this in the second section I use life story accounts to discuss changes to religious identity that occur as participants mature. As discussed in the previous chapter, participants who saw religion as being a significant influence during childhood, moved away from religious practise during their teenage years. Most respondents continued to regard religion as peripheral throughout adolescence and early adulthood. However, I consider the latent influence of religion during an age phase in which religious practise was not important. I suggest that religious teachings were selectively used by participants to neutralise their

involvement in crime. I also look at the ways in which participants, maintained connections to religious communities through their families. Although family relationships were important, the primary influence during this age stage was peer relationships. Within the sample most participants felt that as they matured they reevaluated their childhood religious learning. This meant a move away from religion for some and for others it led to a change in religious affiliation due to peer influence.

5.1. Identity development amongst working class youth

The end of school is a key transition point in identity development. At this stage, adolescents start to develop ideas of a viable career that can lead to financial independence. The strong institutional ties forged through job stability and a career create a commitment to an ‘institutional relationship’ which is regarded as an important aspect of self-identity in young adulthood (Kroger, 2000). This can also play a crucial role in helping individuals move away from crime (Sampson and Laub, 2001), however, the opportunities to transition to a viable career are unevenly available. Experience of social deprivations in childhood are linked to long term deficits in educational attainment, health, behavioural and employment outcomes (Bellis *et al.*, 2014). Along with this, experiences of school exclusion and early interactions with the criminal justice system are also linked to further shrinking of conventional opportunities and development of social bonds that are conducive to future offending (Matza, 1969; Becker, 1973; Caspi and Moffitt, 1995). In this section, I outline the significance of peer relationships and lack of opportunity to develop successful careers as important influences on identity that also played a role in drawing individuals towards crime.

The participants were predominantly from working class backgrounds, with low attainment in school: nine had experienced school exclusions and three had experienced arrests during their time in school. They described being at a loss at the end of their time in school and felt they had no legitimate opportunities to start a career. Participants’ description of the vacuum that resulted after they made it through their troubled schooling to a situation, where they no longer had any institutional affiliation and no clear idea of how they would progress to a viable career, highlights their lack of social capital to successfully transition through this turning point. They lacked the qualifications to take up high skill jobs; along with this, there was a lack of availability of the types of manual and factory jobs that their parents had done.

In the absence of institutional ties through the development of a viable career, participants were drawn towards peer group associations in their neighbourhood.

Within the neighbourhood context, territorial affiliations, physical strength, a risk-taking attitude and aggression were considered essential attributes for survival. These attributes became an important part of self-identity. As participants matured, status and power in the neighbourhood shifted from physical strength and defending territorial affiliations to having a lifestyle in which expensive consumer goods was an important marker of identity. Having high end consumer goods to keep up with peers and being attractive to women were the most pressing concerns at this stage. Participants saw crime as a means to access a lifestyle that they felt they were denied by their class and race position.

5.11. Neighbourhood affiliation, peer influence and hypermasculinity

Rather than seeing crime as intrinsic to sub-cultures or the personal characteristics of offenders, 'Social Learning Theory' attaches importance to learning of norms and values conducive to criminal acts through social interactions (Akers, 1996). Jefferson (1994) regards crime as an expression of anxiety and vulnerability in the face of hegemonic conceptions of masculinity. Masculinity is a fluid, plural and changing category which develops through the intersectional influences of factors such as class, race, ethnicity, age and sexual orientation (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Connell (1995) defines hegemonic masculinity as cultural practises through which men's domination is legitimised and perpetuated in society. This domination is a process of subjugation of women as well as of men who do not fit narrowly-defined conceptions of masculinity. These differences lead to a gender hierarchy based on differences of class, ethnicity, age and sexual orientation (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005).

Situated in the work on hegemonic masculinity, the concept of hypermasculinity describes the adoption of exaggerated versions of hegemonic male attributes such as aggression, physical violence, risk-taking, protecting one's own, and being independent as a response to marginalisation and perceived powerlessness (Bengtsson, 2016). Charlesworth's (2000) research on identity formation amongst working class youth emphasises the importance of developing 'fronts', described as an ability to respond with aggression to deal with systemic

humiliation and stigmatisation facing working class youth due to their disadvantaged position in the labour market and their social surroundings. These attributes play an important role in masculine subjectivities for young men from deprived socioeconomic backgrounds. These subjectivities also play a significant role in the perpetuation of crime and imprisonment amongst this group.

In their seminal work on youth subcultures, Robin and Cohen (1978) contextualise youth deviancy and subcultures in the breakdown of working class culture through the shrinking of work opportunities (due to de-industrialisation), along with the breakdown of neighbourhood communities (due to housing policy changes). This sense of dislocation experienced by working class youth was offset by peer relationships and territorial affiliations where a sense of community and identity was conferred through belonging in a peer group (Robins and Cohen, 1978; Alexander, 2008; Fraser, 2015). Social ties within peer groups were seen as important in helping working class youth transition from childhood to adulthood (Robins and Cohen, 1978). Defending space and territory emerges as one of the oldest expressions of working class masculinity (Robins and Cohen, 1978; Bucerius, 2014; Fraser, 2015). The importance of territorial ties was described in Imran's story. He described his neighbourhood as follows:

I mean I feel because I was born here, I mean all my friends, majority of my friends that I know they're all here so in that role obviously I feel comfortable.

For Imran, his friendships involved territorial and neighbourhood affiliations which became the basis for fights over 'petty' squabbles.

It was just different areas, so you'd have lads from different areas, we'd have lads from different areas and erm that was it, I dunno if like if someone had a fight in the area and they were our friends and we'd get involved and it was just tit for tat... They were like lads from (name of area), you had lads from (name of area) so it was like we did get into fights, it was petty things, we got, obviously, we got in, but then that was it, once someone had a fight it'd just be a gang thing.

Imran and his group of friends were not involved in serious crime. However, they ended up in an exchange with the police and he served a twelve-month sentence for assault.

That was when I was a kid, I was 20 years old, we were, obviously we were always messing around and we ended up getting in trouble with the police and we've punched a couple of police officers up, couple of my lads, couple of my mate and we've ended up getting jail for it.

A few years later he served another prison sentence for intimidating a witness. This was related to a fight in his area which had led to the arrest of one of his friends.

Difficult relationships with the family also strengthened the appeal of peer relationships and territorial affiliations (Farrington, 2000). Ali, Vin, Zulfikar, Steve and Hameed described being homeless during their adolescence. Vin was sofa-hopping at friends' houses or paying for bed and breakfast accommodation through his burglaries and drug dealing. Steve, Zulfikar and Hameed shifted between the houses of different family members throughout their adolescence. This insecure housing made crime even more attractive and strengthened the pull of peer relationships.

Ali ran away from home at the age of fifteen due to a troubled relationship with his mother's partner. He started living on the streets in London and joined a Chinese triad while living on the streets. The 'casual' nature of violence within the gang was explained by Ali as follows:

I'm not a person that takes pleasure in attacking a single person. When I was younger I loved a good fight there's no doubt, I loved having a good scrap. But I liked, I was a typical white South Londoner, I liked getting involved, them, us, 'Have it!' Do you know what I mean? I come from the football hooligan. That to me was more honourable. (Laughs.) It was out of hand, but it was a group of guys consciously taking that decision to have it with each other. And in the Irish culture, you know you'll have an argument, go out you knock the geezer out, he'll get up buy you a pint and it will be forgotten. That's just the way it is. You know violence is casual with the Irish. They don't shy away from violence. Unfortunately, there is a section of us that have a bit too much but generally it's just part and parcel. I think in this society today I think we try to deny that side of people and that's why it comes out in gangs, it comes out in hooligans, it comes out in other ways, because men do like a scrap.

In one gang fight Ali got carried away, he brutally attacked a member of the opposing gang with a machete, leaving his victim severely disabled. His final sentence was for attempted murder. Ali had broken down into tears when talking of this attack. His sympathy for his victim, however, was mitigated by the fact that the victim was a gang member and ‘knew’ what he was getting into: denying injury is a technique of neutralisation (Sykes and Matza, 1957). Ali was ashamed at his loss of control. For him, group fighting was managed and fun. In this instance, he felt other pressures in his life had made him lose control. Ali served nine years in prison for attempted murder.

Peer bonding amongst men reinforces hegemonic masculinity by excluding all women and men considered weak (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). To become part of the fraternal collective, displaying physical prowess, a risk-taking attitude and willingness to respond with aggression are usual rites of passage through which individuals gain acceptance and respect within the group (Jewkes 2005). Experiences of bullying and racist attacks in the neighbourhood were critical turning points after which respondents described shifts in their own identity, which led to the development of a ‘tougher’ and more aggressive outward identity. Immad, Zulfikar, Ilyas, Vin and Naveed described experiencing racist bullying and aggression as important turning points that led to changes in identity and their involvement in increasingly violent altercations.

The move from victim to aggressor was important in Naveed’s story. He described how he changed from being the victim of racist bullying to becoming quite aggressive himself.

Then when I went to sixth form I met this guy and he was really, like a cool guy you know, really good body, good looking, girls loved him. They used to stand outside. So me and him got on well and he actually taught me to fight and he took me under his wing and so I would get into trouble with him. I would go out and get into fights because then I kind of went the other way then. You know people, I’m not gonna have it anymore.

It was through his new friend that Naveed was drawn into a fight that got out of control. A simple altercation over a girl escalated when Naveed’s friend stabbed the girl’s boyfriend. They had gone to see the victim in hopes of intimidating him, however Naveed’s friends had a knife and he inflicted a fatal wound. Naveed and another friend were landing punches and

holding the victim. All three were arrested and convicted for murder. He spent seventeen years in prison. For Naveed, his crime was an attempt at helping a friend who had been mistreated by the victim in the past.

The increased importance of peer bonds, territorial affinity, as well as the significance of aggression, violence and risk-taking within these fraternal collectives describes one of the routes to adulthood available to working class youth. These traits of working class youth culture were also central to their pathways to crime and imprisonment as outlined in the case studies used in this section. In the next section, I discuss the importance of crime as a route to gaining financial independence: another important aspect of adult male identity where working class youth are at a disadvantage due to their lack of social and economic capital.

5.12. Deprivations and materialism

The emphasis on consumption and consumer goods in defining identity is considered a crucial aspect of self in late modernity (Hallsworth, 2005; Bauman, 2007). However, access to consumer goods and a leisure lifestyle can be limited for some groups, based on their class, gender or race position (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960; Merton, 1968). This mix of a high value attached to consumer goods and leisure and the lack resources to access both is described as important in motivating increased involvement in crime (Agnew, 2012). The lack of opportunity available to participants due to their difficult school experiences combined with their experiences of loss and trauma during childhood placed them in very vulnerable positions. In such situations, crime can offer access to ‘forms of status, power and excitement that would otherwise not be available to them.’ (Lochner, 2004). I explore the importance of material and financial success for young adult male identity and their ‘spiralling’ involvement in crime (Lochner, 2004; Hallsworth, 2005).

The increased symbolic importance of consumer goods is explained by Vin³⁰ as follows:

Yeah by the time I was 14, it was less about reputation and fear and these things and fighting and violence, because I'd already established myself by this point. It was more now money, money, money. 'Cuz money improves your image now. What

³⁰ Vin, age 21, mixed race, Salafi (convert), conviction for burglary, longest prison term: 15 months.

you've established becomes visual now rather than just mental, with girls as well, all of this stuff.

This involvement in selling drugs to make money quickly spiralled for Vin.

You know, I didn't know anything really. I just kind of got in too deep. You know, my life. If I'm explaining things to you, you know hearing how I'm explaining it to you, you could possibly picture and imagine how things just went from one to the next.

You know, just my life's like a movie, just me living, trying to survive, you know?

Vin's time in his gang selling drugs ended abruptly because of an argument with one of the senior drug dealers in his area. Due to this incident, all the older generation drug dealers in his area refused to work with him. Vin started feeling financial pressures again. He realised he could make money from burglaries more quickly than dealing drugs, and he moved to burglaries. The risk of being caught was much higher in burglary and he was caught and convicted at the age of seventeen. Vin served a youth rehabilitation order for about nine to twelve months. A year later he was arrested again and got a nine-month sentence; he served four and a half months in a young offender's institute. Vin was arrested again for burglary a few years later; this time he got a three-year sentence and served fifteen and a half months in prison.

Similarly, Waqar described becoming involved in drug dealing to avoid boredom and to make a bit of money. As his group of friends matured, they started valuing the money they got from crime more and more.

When we was youngsters, that could've been described as a gang, that's when people used to like do dumb stuff areas and stuff. Now, most of the people are like--how would I put it? Interested about their income. That's more priority, unless it's a thing where you've got something personal against something. Like say someone right now hurt my brother or hurt my friend, that's something personal, that's got nothing to do with gang this or area that. That's the problem. That's like personal, and whatever else everyone just wants to get more interested in their business part of thing. That's all childish, that type of stuff messes up your other side. So, more time, people think like, 'I'll stick to that section'.

Steve and Hammad were both young offenders who tried finding work after leaving school. However, neither of them was able to find a stable job and they got involved in drug dealing to make some 'easy money'. Hameed:

Like there was a thing where, I done it just, so I can progress myself in a better way, know what I mean? Not make it a habit sort of stuff. So yeah, I was good but just most of the time, when I was in college and stuff, plus no work sort of thing, no training, no training no nothing, so most jobs were taken because I didn't have the card or any sort of training. And then with that, these little silly like Tesco sort of jobs. I wasn't very interested in those sort of jobs, so I just stayed that I was going to work basically try and make some money and then leave. So that's when I got involved into that drugs and that, for like low-level drugs to high-level drugs. That's basically when I ended up in jail sort of thing.

Younger offenders described their involvement in crime as temporary: they were drawn to crime through boredom and to make some 'quick' money. This early involvement in crime had spiralled for some of the older offenders who became involved in more serious crimes such as armed robbery and drug trafficking. Ilyas, Abdullah and Ammar, all persistent offenders, focused on the importance of crime as a means of accessing a lifestyle they felt was unavailable to them.

Ilyas³¹ (British Pakistani) and his friends had formed a neighbourhood gang to protect themselves from racist attacks. Through this gang, he had become involved in vandalism and drug taking. After leaving school, the focus of the gang shifted from small mischievous acts: they started thinking about ways to make money. The desire for a lifestyle none of them felt they could access through the low paid jobs available to them after leaving school, propelled them towards more serious offending. Ilyas served a two-year sentence at the age of twenty-three for fraud, robbery and cloning credit cards.

³¹ Ilyas, age 37, British Pakistan, Sufi- Muslim, conviction for robbery and fraud, longest prison term: 2 years.

'Cause really, it's just about money, it's not about anything else, you know, it's about the people they want money, they see nice things, they want nice things, they want money, you know, they're not doctors or sons of doctors where they've got it so they have to do what they do, what they see fit, unfortunately. That's it.[...]

The crimes progressed as well then, you know, you start doing more serious things, you know, from small little drug dealing to car robbery. Start off car stereos and you know stuff like this and then you just progress, progress, progress. Before you know it, you're doing armed robberies and you got hundred thousand pound fifty, you know whatever is there, whatever you do. So, it just keeps going and then you have to maintain that as well then, you see, so you have to keep on doing things. And, and then when I got caught, I got caught in London 2000, yeah I went on the run in '97 and I got caught in 2000, and I got my first custodial sentence then.

Visual display of wealth through gold chains, fancy cars and access to women was a theme repeated by many of the older offenders. Abdullah³² (British Pakistani) wanted to be like some of the drug dealers who worked in his area. Their access to women and money was attractive for him and he aspired to a similar lifestyle. Abdullah had been earning a steady income as a security guard; he was drawn towards crime as a way of supplementing his income.

Then you had the criminals who would come in with the fancy girls, you know and the gold, you know what I mean, innit, the image. So, you think 'Wow! I'd love to be like that...' So, it was like they chose ya, they said 'listen, do you want to do a bit? You'll make this much if you do this', you know stuff like that, that's what it started from, it started from small and then you know it just grew. That's what it was. I got involved with a lot of people you know that I shouldna got involved in.

As his involvement in drug dealing increased, his lifestyle changed quite dramatically. He could afford a lifestyle which was not accessible to people within his British Pakistani community.

³² Abdullah, 44, British Pakistani, Sufi- Muslim, conviction for drug dealing, longest prison term: 2 years.

In 2002 there wasn't even that many people driving a Jaguar then. Pakistani people didn't know what a Jaguar looked like probably. They knew but nobody ever drove a Jaguar. So, I was one of the first lads in Manchester, I actually seen myself driving a 3.0 litre Jaguar.

Ammar³³ (Black Caribbean), another armed robber, described being drawn to crime to access a lifestyle he felt he was unable to afford.

I think what I did is, I put huge amounts of value on material acquisitions. I almost used that as a barometer of where I was at. I grew up in a hugely wealthy area of London, (name of area). I kind of you know had an idea or glimpse of what I viewed material acquisition would achieve for you... And I think that is the difference really, the difference with class, difference with privilege and opportunity. Everybody that is surrounding you in a way has an existing network of people that propel them onto the next phase. You know when you get into the working class, and especially unemployed working class, you tend to find that those opportunities aren't visible within the household, you have to finally go outside and find them. And you know when you are young it is extremely difficult to navigate your way through them when you are doing that on your own and you have already come to the attention of the criminal justice system. So that's why I probably when I unpick it, you equated all these things (crime) as being able to give you this, and they did for the most part, a temporary happiness, a level of freedom which was only really based on choice, but that was fleeting because there would be times when you would be subject to sanction and you had no choice. So that's probably why.

As Ammar's involvement in crime increased, the visual display of expensive consumer items became an important part of his status and identity.

And you know at that time I would wear a really expensive watch and had this chain... my chain was tucked in, it had diamonds around here...it's garbage...really really high quality diamonds, but something that someone on the stage would wear,

³³ Ammar, 44, Black Caribbean, Salafi(convert), conviction for armed robbery, longest prison term, 8 years.

not just the guy on the street. But that was how you would target yourself out, it's like a pay grade. You know a guy who works in the city would drive a particular vehicle and that would kind of indicate to those who are around him that his pay grade is this. And that's kinda what these silly trinkets, pieces of material acquisitions indicate to people, that if he's paid 20,000 for a chain this guy has some serious money.

This section has outlined the ways in which participants felt pushed towards crime through the pressures represented through their lack of social and economic capital. Along with this, I have outlined the 'pull' towards crime through the participants' desire for consumer goods to which they attached high symbolic value and regarded as a means of achieving status unavailable to them from their position of social disadvantage. Most of the participants described in this section felt that their low educational attainment in school and lack of qualifications were significant factors in making them feel that their only opportunity to succeed lay in crime. Low educational attainment and school exclusion are considered important risk factors that can lead to involvement in crime. In contrast, higher education is seen as a protective factor which can lead vulnerable youth away from crime.

Despite the perceived social prestige attached to higher education qualifications and its role in promoting social mobility, four of the participants who attended university were convicted for varying criminal offences. The next section focuses on the experiences of the four participants who attended university and outlines the factors they considered important in driving them towards involvement in crime.

5.13. University experiences

Poor educational attainment is a risk factor for offending. Most offenders, certainly those that find themselves in custody, have relatively low levels of educational achievement. The four respondents in this study that went to university are therefore a potentially unusual and interesting group. The social benefits of higher education and its negative correlation with street crime is well established (Machin and Meghir, 2004). Higher education increases the chances of finding well paid work and establishing a career. This access to a stable, well paid career increases the 'cost' of involvement in crime (Machin and Meghir, 2004). In this sample, participants who accessed higher education described the many hurdles their personal

circumstances of being from a working-class immigrant family placed on their ability to use their education to access professional jobs. For two of the participants, early introduction to drug-taking impacted their mental health and ability to commit to work. The other two participants, Rahim and Ahmed, felt that the influence of authoritarian parenting and continued expectations from parents into their adulthood led them to involvement in crime.

Mohammad³⁴ (British Pakistani) started a degree in Computer Science after finishing school. During his second year at university, close to his end of year exams, he had a mental breakdown. Mohammad's parents had divorced when he was a year old, and he had lost touch with his father. He was also sexually abused at the age of five. He felt he was drawn to drugs to deal with the emotional turmoil he experienced during childhood. In university, Mohammad kept using drugs to deal with the pressure of exams; he attributed his mental breakdown to his unresolved emotions stemming from his traumatic childhood experiences and his use of drugs. He felt unable to cope with the pressures of his degree and had to withdraw for a year.

Yeah. So, when I was 19, about 19 years old and that was to do with smoking skunk and staying up late, maybe possible cocaine use but erm not sleeping cause of exams. It was exams period where I felt really ill, started feeling really ill, wasn't eating properly and then with coming out of first year of university when I told my sister. It was around that age yeah about 15 years later it was that I told. I hadn't told anyone so I told my sister about my childhood abuse. All these, all these mix of, all these different factors they brought it out in me and I ended up yeah having a psychotic episode... I was, yeah having visual audio, hallucinations and just not being able to distinguish reality from non-reality... in the end, I got voluntarily sectioned, diagnosed paranoid schizophrenic and been on medication, maximum dose of anti-psychotics for the last, so last 13 years, 14 years maybe. So, I, I, I just remember around that time I really wanted to see what my dad— and it was doing my head in you know, I was going crazy about walking past Asian fellas and saying “could this be my father?” and you know I just wanted to know what he looked like.

³⁴ Mohammad, 33, British Pakistan, Sunni, conviction for armed robbery and drugs, longest prison term, 3 years.

Mohammad eventually finished his degree, but because of his mental health condition he felt IT work would be too stressful for him and did not join any formal employment after university. After his psychotic episode, he reduced his consumption of recreational drugs (cocaine and heroin) but remained involved in selling drugs. He was arrested at the age of twenty-eight for intimidating the public with an imitation firearm, involvement in the supply of drugs, and money laundering.

Unlike the other participants who attended university, Zulfikar³⁵ (British Pakistani) did not go to university straight after school. Like some of the participants discussed in the previous section, Zulfikar had joined a gang to protect himself from racist bullying. Through these friendships, he had got involved in using and selling drugs along with burglaries. He moved away from the gang at the age of nineteen, after the death of his mother. Zulfikar tried to have a fresh start; he got married to a cousin in Pakistan and tried to settle down away from the neighbourhood where he grew up in Nottingham. He moved to London to live with an uncle, started a law degree, and found work as a paralegal with a law firm.

Zulfikar was drawn back towards crime through his use of drugs. His drug habit impacted his work and relationships. He reconnected with some of his old friends and built a new network of friends through which he became involved in crime again. As part of his new group, he was involved in selling class A drugs, shoplifting and car theft. He had been in and out of prison more than nine times for various offences.

I was like a kind of person that's addicted to addiction. Someone who likes a head change, someone who likes to feel different every day and the drugs made me feel different. So that's why I take them, I take them to enjoy the buzz and I didn't care about the consequences...I manage work for a while but in the end, I lost all the jobs, all 4-5 that I managed to get hold of. Fell out with my uncle and moved to the new property, couldn't afford the rent, became homeless, partner and firm told me to go back to Nottingham and I erm they basically told me just go back to Nottingham for a little while. I went back to Nottingham and I ended up never going back to work which was a big mistake. I should have gone back to work you know and then I would have been alright but I ended up going back to Nottingham, following into bad habits,

³⁵ Zulfikar, 33, British Pakistan, Sunni, violent assault, longest prison term, 2 years.

started taking heroin again and crack cocaine, started really started committing serious crime...

Ahmed and Rahim felt that their experiences of authoritarian parenting created pressures which led them to become involved in crime. Experience of coercive or harsh parenting style is considered a predictor for involvement in crime (Thompson, Hollis and Richards, 2003; Farrington et al., 2015). Rahim³⁶ (British Pakistani) studied Business and IT at university. His main reason for going to university was to please his parents who were very keen for him to have a professional career. Rahim was ambivalent about his time at university; he enjoyed the friendships he made there but did not enjoy studying. While he was in university, his father developed mental health issues and had to stop working. As the oldest son, Rahim started feeling immense pressure to start supporting his family. From a young age, he had felt guilty about the sacrifices his parents made to give him a good education. His parents expected him to do well in his studies, establish himself in a professional career and support them financially. Although Rahim managed to complete his degree, he was unsure what to do after graduating. Despite his parent's wishes, he felt that establishing himself in a professional career entailed having access to social capital which was lacking in his life. He took up driving taxis like his father.

I looked into it like and you know, I realised, I go 'The people that these jobs suit are people who got time, people who got no pressure'. And then I thought, 'I can't really compete with these people 'cause either they've got parents who are working, yeah, or parents who are not working but can afford to send their kid out without, with measly wages or there's what's the other thing? Yeah or they got four five older brothers or sisters working, bringing money home so they can afford to even get a job for free for work experience and even move higher up the ladder'... And I was thinking this cycle which, do you understand what I mean, and pressure builds you're thinking I can't take it anymore like... I looked into, I thought, if I do this no one else is gonna provide at home, and dad didn't have a car in them days... So I give up, I give... I just got into a job as a taxi driver. But I still, my intentions were still the same so, and

³⁶ Rahim, 34, British Pakistan, Sufi-Muslim, conviction for fraud, community sentence: 6 months

what a graduate job couldn't do that was doing cause, I was giving home £500 a week.

After a while, Rahim got frustrated with the mundane nature of his work and his stagnant pay scale. He also felt that he had let his parents down by not making anything of his education. His university friends who had started at a lower pay scale than him were now earning much more. Rahim tried to switch from driving taxis back into a professional career a few times, however despite his qualifications, he found it extremely difficult to make the switch. He became involved in insurance fraud to try to make extra money on top of his job driving taxis. He was caught and served two hundred hours of community service.

Like Rahim, Ahmed's³⁷ father became unwell while he was at university. He left his degree in biomedical sciences to help his father manage his takeaway restaurant. His father lost his share in the restaurant due to disagreements with some of the other business partners. After his father's business collapsed, Ahmed did many different jobs ranging from driving buses to working in the charity sector. His last position was working as a business analyst. Although Ahmed's work was not related to the degree he studied, he was the only participant who worked in a professional field after leaving university. Ahmed was convicted of paedophilia at the age of forty. The influence of authoritarian parenting on his identity and involvement in crime will be discussed in the next section.

The deficits that participants faced during childhood continued to affect their lives during adolescence and into adulthood. Even the unusual few who made it to university faced many hurdles that prevented them from using higher education as an opportunity to develop a stable professional career. The influence of parenting style, experiences of abuse, early exposure to drugs, and strained economic circumstances at home were some of the factors that presented long term challenges for participants.

5.2. Role (or absence) of religion in adolescence and early adulthood

This section discusses the absence of religious practise or talk in the lives of respondents during this age phase. It looks at the religious experiences of participants up to the age of

³⁷ Ahmed, age 45, British Bangladeshi, Sunni, conviction for paedophilia, longest prison term: 2 years.

their first custodial sentence. Since the age of the first prison sentence varied within the sample, in some cases, this section covers religious experiences from the age of sixteen or seventeen up to adulthood (twenty-five or older); for others there is little to add to what was discussed in the previous chapter as they were arrested within a few months or a year of leaving school. In the previous chapter, participants who had a religious childhood described moving away from religion during their teenage years. This absence of religion remained constant throughout their adolescence and early adulthood. Participants saw religion as peripheral to other concerns that were much more significant, such as financial independence and peer and sexual relationships. Rather than affiliation to institutional religious practise, religion was expressed through a connection to family and community.

An important aspect of everyday life was managing different social connections and values of the different groups that participants were affiliated with. They described the different ways in which they managed life within their family and community along with their involvement in crime through peer relationships. Recent research has looked at the complex relationship between crime and religiosity. In some cases unconscious or deliberate misinterpretation of religious teaching are used to justify involvement in crime (Topalli, Brezina and Bernhardt, 2013). These participants also described complex strategies by which they reconciled their religious upbringing with their offending.

Participants saw the absence of religion in their lives as an important reason for their being drawn towards crime. In this was they retained an idea of a 'pure' religious ideal self they could return to if they moved away from crime. Along with this, hiding crime from their community was regarded as a form of respect towards norms that they were breaking through their involvement in crime. This acceptance of religious norms, without adherence to these norms, acted as techniques of neutralisation to justify involvement in crime. Some of the participants felt that their good actions, whether in the community or outside were offsetting the sin of their involvement in crime. Along with this some saw the 'temptations' or 'pull' towards crime as an external force propelling them towards criminal involvement, they saw themselves as passive victims in caught up in this pull (Topalli, Brezina and Bernhardt, 2013).

5.21. Religion, family and crime

Link to a religious community is regarded as important in mitigating involvement in crime as the negative consequences of involvement in crime such as experiences of shame, societal disapproval as well as the loss of social relationships and bonds act as deterrents for religious individuals who are more concerned of being subject to these consequences (Hirschi and Stark, 1969). Along with this, religions communities influence conformity by promoting moral messages that condemn acts of deviance and crime (Akers, 1996). In explaining the over representation of second generation Muslim immigrants in the offender population, explanations focus on ‘culture clash’ and ‘intergenerational conflict.’ The life story accounts presented by the participants offered more complex negotiation of different forms of identifications. In their descriptions of their life during this age phase, holding on to religious moral values, maintaining family and kinship connections as well as adopting codes from ‘the road’ and close and complex relationships outside their communities was an everyday part of their lives. Participants described different internal and external ideas of the self through which they maintained a connection to a religious community, a set of moral values and spirituality while being involved in crime. Furthermore, although religious community provided advice and other soft forms of social control, ultimately individuals were free to make their own choices. Where communities ‘forced’ or pressurised individuals this usually led to a back lash (see Ahmed).

Participants described elaborate processes through which they maintained aspects of family and community life while also describing aspects of their lives which were situated outside their family and community. They were aware of the tension between their ethnic or community values and the values underpinning peer interactions and managed a complex set of relationships within their family as well as their neighbourhoods. This maintenance and performance of identity in different social contexts, ranging from peers to religious community, was an important part of this age phase. I discuss changes to identity brought about through this expansion of social roles, differing values and involvement in crime.

Abdullah, a British Pakistani born-Muslim, had described the importance of religion during his childhood through time at the mosque and his role within his kinship community. This kinship community was built on ties and relationships with members who had immigrated to England with his grandfather from their family’s village in Kashmir. As he grew older,

Abdullah stopped going to the mosque regularly. He also made a wider circle of friends in his neighbourhood. Time at the mosque was no longer a regular part of his life, neither was religious practise. Despite these changes, maintaining a connection to his kinship community was important for Abdullah. Even at the time that he was most heavily involved in supplying drugs, he kept a strong involvement in his community. Abdullah felt that conforming to the traditions and practises of the community meant that he avoided stigma within the community for his involvement in crime.

In what Abdullah describes of his community, there were strong interpersonal links and information about members of the community flowed very quickly. However, there was also a practised averting of attention from lifestyles and values that may clash with the more traditional values and customs that were considered central to the functioning of the community. Media portrayal and concern around increasing crime amongst Muslim youth commonly attribute it to a 'mixture of cultural clash, intergenerational conflict and social and economic breakdown, with a strong emphasis on 'between two cultures' identity crisis...' (see Alexander, 2000; 9 for a critical account). From Abdullah's description of his relationship with the older generation in his local Pakistani community, this did not seem to be the case.

'Some of them say it doesn't matter what he does, he's a good lad. Wherever you see him, 'Asalaamalaikum uncle jee, this that, he's always good. Some of the other lads they're not like that'. So you know you had a mix. But the elders, I used to get on with the elders because I always used to give salaam, doesn't matter what I am like, how I'm like, I always show respect to my elders.'

As Abdullah matured and built a wider social network, his attitude, values and relationships became influenced by a more diverse range of social groups with whom he was interacting. This is outlined in the way in which Abdullah maintained a complex set of relationships within his community while being involved in his gang.

The personal family didn't really know. They knew and they didn't know. The young part of the family knew but kept it quiet, but the in between knew and didn't know, but they said 'Listen whatever you do, we don't know what you're doing, you know remember who you are. You know khandani bunda hai (he's a family man). We got a very lot of respect, people respect, look up to us, don't mess it up'. And they were all

scared cause we're Rajput in Pakistan and we're a well-known family, very respectable, you know this and that, people look up to us and it was all that khandani (family) kind of thing, be careful. Women, family women, I don't think they're really gived a shit, they wasn't really interested. You know I was always be nice to them, I would always gived them time. My wife, she, she knew, and she didn't but when I give her money in her hand, she'd go 'Where's that from?' It's like 'Why? What difference does it make where's it from?' She goes 'Because I have to pull zakat out, sadaqah (charity) out, I'm putting food on the table so if it's haram, take it away, don't want it'.

Abdullah felt that the values learnt in his community, and that he regarded as important, were significant in helping him progress in his criminal career. He explained how respect of elders, politeness, hospitality and worldliness were important to his success in his criminal career. He felt that the rules and values he had learnt in his community applied in all his interactions, even outside his community. This influence of rules of behaviour, learnt through participation in a religious community, in helping navigate relationships in a drug dealing gang highlight the merging or influence of the transcendental on transactional aspects of identity (as suggested by Bloch 2008).

Why I became so big and fast and successful 'cause that mentality of hospitality and being polite as being a Muslim, it went well with the elder, old time gangsters, who are budeh (old) because a lot of them are old and they're old people, do you understand what I mean? You gave 'em that hospitality, you gave 'em that, it was, it wasn't, it was my upbringing it's in that Islamic, it's in that Islamic way of being polite and showing that hospitality

Abdullah described 'combining' influences from a range of sources in developing his values and beliefs (Sykes and Matza, 1957). For Abdullah, the rules and structures of both the night club and the drug dealing gang that he joined were like the rules and structures of his community. He did not see them as oppositional or alien. For Abdullah, religion played an important part in helping him progress in his criminal career; along with this, he felt that religion tempered his involvement in crime. His continuing involvement with his family was a reminder that an aspect of his identity was at odds with ideas of good behaviour and being a

‘family man’. He felt that hiding his crimes also showed that at a personal level he was ashamed of what he did.

You know when they say ‘sayah’, means the shadow; my shadow. I was like I don’t want that to come onto these (people in his community). You understand what I mean. You know like youngsters today, ‘Uncle there, he’s killing it? What is he doing? He’s doing drugs, he’s doing this; he’s smashing big timer.’ You become a figure and astagfirullah (God forgive me), because of me, someone seen me and then going on that side, and coming on because of me, that makes me feel let down, because I’m responsible for that person. So for me, I kept myself away. That’s the way I was. The only difference between me and somebody else was, I give’d a shit. So I used to say to myself, theekeh, (alright) I’m doing what I’m doing but keep it to yourself. So if I’m diseased don’t give it to somebody else.

Absence of religion in their lives during the phase that they became involved in crime was another common way in which criminal involvement was explained by participants. Ahmed and Mohammad (both born Muslims) felt that they got involved in crime because they moved away from religious practise. Respondents employed narratives that focused on being pulled towards worldly desires, being drawn away from moral values, or being weak in the face of temptation. Seeing their crimes as a consequence of external forces helped participants deny responsibility for their actions (a common technique of neutralisation) (Sykes and Matza, 1957). This also meant that they held onto the idea of having a primary identity which was pure and untainted, this allowed them to separate crime from their identity. Reverting to an untainted religious identity was an aspiration they could hang onto while being involved in crime (Maruna and Copes, 2005).

For Ahmed (British Bangladeshi), religion was the basis through which his father had set restrictions on his behaviour during his childhood. This remained the case throughout his adolescence and adulthood. When Ahmed was nineteen, he was called to Bangladesh for a holiday. When he arrived, he discovered that his father had arranged his marriage to a cousin. He got married at the age of twenty and stayed with his wife in Bangladesh. Ahmed’s life story is different from the other participants. During his adolescent years, he was not involved in crime at all. While the other participants describe changes to identity during this age stage,

for Ahmed these years were an extension of his childhood experience, where his father was making all important decisions for him.

Ahmed is perhaps the only participant who did not describe a shift in his thinking or values during mid-adolescence. While most of the participants were moving away from their parental homes and trying out values and relationships outside their immediate family, Ahmed's life was centred on his father's business. His wife was also chosen by his parents and he lived in an apartment very close to his parent's house. Although arranged marriages and living with or near parents was quite common amongst British South Asian participants, they still described forging their own social networks away from their parents or defying their parent's expectations and making choices for themselves in different ways.

Ahmed's description of his early adulthood suggests a foreclosed personality (Kroger, 2000) where he kept adhering to his parents' decisions rather than figuring out his own desires. A foreclosed personality type is defined as an adult identity in which a person has not gone through an intense period of exploration which is as an important part of identity development (Kroger 2000). It was in mid-adulthood, close to the age of forty, that Ahmed started resenting the strong control his parents had on his life. This resentment extended to his wife and children. He felt all his relationships were coercive and that his only role was as a financial provider. Although Ahmed was convicted for sexual relations with a child, and his crime was not a crime of property, he felt his actions were influenced by his focus on material acquisition. He felt his focus on the material had distanced him from moral values and his family. He sought to escape the pressures of his life by creating an alternate life for himself.

Money became God instead of God you know... It was pure and simple money you know, I was chasing as I said the next promotion, the next pay rise that's what I wanted, everything else was second and the problem is I convinced myself the reason I was doing this was for my family, but thinking back at it now na, na it was just the thrill of the chase you know, when they talk about the rat race I know what it means now but it's taken me time to come out of it to see that.

To escape the pressure of work and family, Ahmed created a new identity for himself online: he started grooming girls under the age of legal consent. He felt that his online activity was the only space in which he could be himself, away from the pressures and expectations of his

family. He met up with one of these girls, who was less than sixteen years old at the time, and had a sexual relationship with her which lasted for a year. He was reported to the police by the girl's stepfather who he met at a concert at the victim's school.

Ahmed had realised that the victim's stepfather had suspicions about him. After this concert, he had panicked: he stopped contacting his victim and ran away to Bangladesh for some time. Upon coming back, he moved houses and he was constantly afraid the police would show up on his doorstep. Ahmed described going through a religious change. He turned to religion, started prioritising his family, and spent a lot of time praying for forgiveness. He travelled to Saudi Arabia for a pilgrimage as well. Ahmed was forty at the time of his arrest. He served two years in prison.

I think after about a year or so I then went on Umrah which is a programme in Makkah, I went there, I suppose get myself some spiritual forgiveness, see if I can make amends and I still remember while there I, I still couldn't forgive myself, I couldn't ask God for forgiveness because I couldn't forgive myself so what I did do is, I asked for justice, so I said "look, you know either give me the courage to go to the police or let the police catch me", one way or another I just needed this result because it was now every waking moment's thinking 'are they gonna come tomorrow, are they gonna come tomorrow?', walking down the road, you're just worried that they're gonna arrest you at any time.

Like most of the participants discussed in this section, Zulfikar (British Pakistani) had moved away from religion as a teenager. He had formed a gang with friends in school to deal with racist attacks. Through this gang he had become involved in drug dealing and taking, along with burglaries. Zulfikar stopped burglaries at the age of nineteen because of the guilt he felt at causing harm to his victims. However, he continued to take drugs (heroin) and became involved in crime again to support his drug habit. When he started committing offences again, he took up crimes such as shoplifting and car theft: he saw his new crimes as causing 'indirect' harm. This technique of neutralisation allowed him to not feel the same guilt or pressure to stop offending. Zulfikar attributed also the troubled time he had in life to his fate. This externalising of reasons for his actions was another technique of neutralisation in which his choices were beyond his personal control.

It was just what I was doing at the time. It's easy to say things could have been different, that's not the way fate works you know it is what it is. You have choices and once you make those choices that's your fate. There's no changing it, there's no 'Yeah I could have done this' I could have done that, but you can't change fate.

Day (2010) talks about religious belief as an internalised part of identity which is inherited through family. For many born-Muslim participants, religion was a connection to a family and a cultural heritage that was Muslim. Travelling to Muslim countries, particularly their country of origin, was a way of becoming more aware of religion as an internalised part of ethnic heritage. Both Immad and Waqar were sent abroad to study religion by their parents, who were concerned about their increasing involvement in conflict and drugs in their neighbourhoods. They thought extended trips abroad would distance them from their neighbourhood friends and help them settle down. These trips were a form of soft social control exercised by parents in the hope that it would lead to a longer lasting change in behaviour and associations. When participants travelled back to their countries of origin, these were places that had also evolved and changed through the outward migration of a large section of the younger generation. In their countries of origin participants were connecting with members of their family or a wider diaspora. Immad for example was sent to Pakistan to spend time in his family village. His visit coincided with the visit of cousins from Sheffield who were also visiting family in the village. Immad's parents had wanted him to spend time at the shrine of their family Sheikh. This Sheikh visited Immad's mosque in England regularly as well, so Immad already had a relationship with the Sheikh.

Similarly, Waqar who was sent on a religious course to Egypt, spoke of spending his time horse riding, smoking weed and meeting other Somali teenagers like himself who had immigrated to other parts of the world. Although both Immad and Waqar described these trips abroad as significant experiences and influences on their identity. The trips did not achieve the result hoped for by their families. Even while they were away, they kept taking recreational drugs and, on their return, they re-established their friendships in their neighbourhood and became further involved in crime.

Erm I think them days it was trying to get you straight, sending you to Pakistan so you might think 'I'm not gonna mess about.' What they were gonna show you, what their living lifestyle over there is like so you realise certain things yeah. Nine months I was

there. I was supposed to go for less, but I think it were just a punishment from me parents to keep me there a bit longer.

During his time in his ancestral village, Immad pledged allegiance to his family's Sheikh; this was a significant moment of his life. At the time of this 'beyt'³⁸, the Sheikh advised Immad to stop smoking. This advice stuck. Although he did not stop smoking weed, he developed a pattern of thought in which difficulties in his life were seen to be due to him smoking weed. Although Immad held onto the idea that his actions were in contradiction to the teachings of his Sheikh, this did not stop him from becoming more involved in crime. However he started seeing everyday setbacks and negative experiences as punishments for his involvement in crime. After coming back from Pakistan, he became involved in more serious crimes and moved away from religion again. As he described this, 'so went a bit off the rails again'. Immad's next spiritual re-engagement was at twenty-one when he started a three-year prison sentence.

Imran's also described his involvement in crime as a divergence from his family values:

Well the parents were religious; we kind of lost track a bit.

Imran described his 'beyah' or pledge of allegiance to his Sheikh as an indication that he held a connection to religion. The Sheikh represented an ideal in terms of the roles to aspire to, although Imran felt he did not fully understand the significance of it at the time.

I took Bayah, like beyt, I took Bayah like at the age of I think it was 18, 19 and I obviously, we didn't really understand, we didn't really know obviously, what these people (Sheikhs) are, what their roles is obviously at that age 'cause we were still messed up then kind of thing.

During a trip to Pakistan, Imran got married to his cousin. He described his marriage at the age of seventeen as an 'arranged or forced' marriage. He was quite happy though, as things had worked out with his wife.

³⁸ Pledge of allegiance to a Sufi Sheikh.

Yeah, it (marriage) was forced but Alhamdulillah I'm alright. Turned out wicked deffo.

Marriage to a member of the extended family from the country of origin at a young age was another way in which connection to the kinship community in the country of origin was maintained. It can also be regarded as another soft control exercised by parents. Life course literature regards marriage or a steady relationship as a turning point which can lead to desistance from crime (Sampson and Laub, 2016). However, within this sample, marriages at a young age were not linked to a move away from crime. Imran continued to be involved in crime and served his first sentence at the age of twenty. Abdullah, Rahim, Imran, Zulfikar and Ahmed (all South Asian) got married to members of their extended family from their country of origin. Of this group, only Rahim's involvement in crime was prior to his marriage; for the rest of the participants their involvement in crime continued despite their marriages. This continued involvement in crime was due to the continued importance of fraternal links, despite marriage and the birth of children, in which violence, aggression and material acquisition continued to be strong influences (also in Jewkes, 2005).

In this section, I explored the ways in which participants navigated relationships and maintained expectations of their community while being involved in crime. The family was regarded as the primary connection to religion, participants described the ways in which they held on to idealised notions of social roles and community expectations while still being involved in crime, which they understood to be in contradiction to these values. Religious beliefs in fate or predestination, externally upholding moral values to preserve a moral community, and seeing oneself as powerless in the face of worldly desires and temptations were some of the ways in which participants rationalised their involvement in crime and the conflicting moral dilemmas this posed for them. The dissonance and maintenance of conflicting and contradictory values, pulls and pressures discussed through these life stories contextualise the influence of religion, showing the ways in which religious belief provides a moral framework and a set of spiritual beliefs with which individuals actively engage to draw personal and varied meanings.

The responses from family and community to involvement in crime also suggests that forms of soft social control exercised through a moral community, operate within a broader context in which the individual is placed. For individuals within religious community perceptions of

their behaviour is one of the factors they consider in developing their identity. At this age stage participants emphasised the importance of fraternal links as the most important social connection which also had more of an influence on actions. Next, I discuss changes to religious identity that occurred through peer influence.

5.22. Religion as influenced by peer relationships

The previous section discussed maintenance of ties to family, relational aspects of community life and connection to a country of origin as aspects of religious communities that remained significant in adolescence. Mid-adolescence is an age phase marked by choice and experimentation (Kroger 2000). This section looks at changes to religious belief and the importance of new relationships formed during adolescence, which led to changes in religious beliefs and belonging. Recent research on religious beliefs and practise amongst youth highlights the re-emerging importance of spiritualism, seen as a need to find personal meaning, outside institutional traditional forms of religion (Collins-Mayo and Dandelion, 2010). This trend is seen to be part of a postmodern order in which sacred has re-emerged as significant in the public as well as personal sphere. An interest in spiritualism and importance of religion on identity, as well as the move away from institutional religion, is highlighted in the life stories.

In her study of religious beliefs amongst British youth, Day (2010) found that for young people, human relationships were the site for ‘experiencing meaning, morality and transcendence’ (Day 2010: 98). During this age stage in understanding religion, participants relied on peer relationships rather than looking for figures with religious authority. Through such explorations, participants formed new social connections or were exposed to ideas they considered important in their own self-development. Within peer relationships participants were exposed to religious beliefs different to the ones they learnt in childhood. Through such interactions, they modified their own practise of religion. Whilst it is more common to see conversion as a change from one faith to another, internal conversions, refer to changes of interpretation, level of commitment and practise that can occur within a faith (Nieuwkerk, 2006). Rahim and Ilyas changed religious sects within Islam through peer influence. Vin

converted to Islam through the influence of his half-brother. I discuss these changes in more detail in this section.

For Rahim and Ilyas, religious connection and belief was influenced through peer relationships in their neighbourhoods in England. Both changed mosques due to the influence of peers. Their experiences of changing mosques and with it, their understanding of faith and their set of social relationships, highlights the presence of multiple Muslim communities within a neighbourhood.

Rahim, a British Pakistani, born Muslim, had attended a mosque that he regarded as authoritarian and dull. In childhood, he had spent long hours at the mosque rote learning religious scripture and prayers. During his time at university, he made friends with British Pakistani boys from his city who attended a different mosque and through these new friendships, Rahim was drawn to their mosque. He started attending regularly, forming new connections through his attendance at this mosque. For Rahim, these social connections were the most important aspect that drew him to the mosque. He became a regular attendee at the mosque to maintain these new friendships. The mosque provided Rahim the opportunity to be involved in many group activities. When there was a religious festival, everyone would cook together. The festivals themselves were social gatherings through which Rahim made a larger group of friends.

Ilyas³⁹ also moved away from his childhood understanding of religion. During his childhood, he belonged to a Sufi order based in India. In his neighbourhood in Coventry, he was drawn to the mosque of a different sect within Islam. Ilyas described his new sect as a fundamentalist Islamist group and it was through this group that he was involved in fund raising for terrorist attacks. The group Ilyas joined was supporting Jihad in Indian Kashmir; they later also expressed support for Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan.

I would promote it myself, you know. As in terms of send money to the so called Mujahideen, you know, because we had a group, we affiliated to a group called Jayish-e-Mohammad and Harkat-e-Mujahideen in Pakistan, you know. So like, so one

³⁹ Ilyas, age 37, British Pakistan, Sufi- Muslim, conviction for robbery and credit card fraud, longest prison term: 2 years.

of the Ameers (religious leader) from there, he was from Coventry and he used to collect all the money and send it to them saying that it's for, whatever it's for, doing their jihad and that. So, people on the street like us, we would want, feel like, you know, so we would give one fifth of what we make, we would give it happily.

For Ilyas his involvement with a fundamentalist religious group was a way of offsetting the guilt of his involvement in crime. He felt that since he was giving the money he earned through crime to what he felt was a spiritual cause he was serving a higher spiritual purpose through his crimes.

I was always like not religious, I was like practically religious sometimes but unfortunately I used to, in Coventry there's a lot of what you would call like Wahabi, they're like 'Taliban', whatever you wanna call 'em and so I was like affiliated with them because I thought, you know, maybe that's right. I believed it, I was made to believe it, should I say, that, that's the correct way. And plus when you're doing bad on the street, and then you know you're doing bad when you're selling drugs, whatever you're doing, robberies, you know you're doing bad and your conscience is telling you 'you're doing bad' so you try to offset it, thinking 'if I do some good' so really that's what you're really doing.

Ilyas had moved away from his involvement with this group by the time of the interview. He was ashamed of his support for this group and did not want to talk about his reasons for becoming involved with them. I did not get a chance for a second interview with Ilyas and could not fill this gap in the data. However, I draw on the explanations provided by Yousef, an Irish convert who had been involved with the IRA, and Ali, an Irish convert who was part of a Chinese gang, to discuss the 'pull' towards involvement with groups that promote crime but can give members a sense that this criminal involvement serves a higher spiritual purpose.

The complex mix of spiritual purpose and involvement in crime is most evident in the story of Yousef⁴⁰ and his involvement with the Irish Republican Army (IRA). For Yousef, his crimes were a direct response to the difficult social conditions he experienced living in Belfast during the Irish Troubles. Due to his membership and involvement in the IRA, Yousef served several long sentences. Understanding his crimes as an honourable and justifiable response to social concerns and conflict allowed him to separate his involvement in crime from what he regarded as ordinary criminals. Seeing crimes as a response to an illegitimate system is a technique of neutralisation that is used to justify involvement in crime. Yousef saw his involvement with the IRA as ‘honourable’ as he felt he was defending his right to pray and live a normal life. This appeal to a higher authority is another common technique of neutralisation, which may have particular salience for those involved in political violence.

Different stuff. Political documents, membership, kidnappings, stuff like that, guns, political stuff. In Ireland, it’s, in Belfast it’s, it’s— You have to live with the understandin’ it’s not shameful, but it’s shameful if somebody comes and steals your car and breaks into your house and robs your granny and all that, I class that as total shameful, drugs, total total shame as in it’s just scandalous. There’s, I think there’s been surveys done and it’s something like 85% of the people in the North of Ireland will have never been in jail, if there hadn’t have been any war going on; they’re just normal people trying to live normal lives. Then you have a foreign body kicking their doors in and doing stuff to their mothers and sisters that they shouldn’t be doing in front of the kids. So, the kids grow up, kids grow up angry. Before you know it, they’re involved in something they shouldn’t have been involved in in the first place.

Ali, who was involved with a Chinese triad, felt that his involvement with this gang gave him an inflated sense of self-importance as he felt he was connected to a powerful international mafia. This sense of connection to a ‘powerful international’ group can also attract individuals towards affiliation with Islamist terrorist groups, as these groups usually claim global influence.

⁴⁰ Yousef, 51, White Irish, Sufi- Muslim (convert), conviction for involvement with Irish Republic Army (IRA), longest prison term: 9 years.

Being with the Chinese gang added an air of respectability, if you like. Air of being involved in something much larger than yourself. Even though I was very much on the periphery and you know being the age that I was I didn't realise that I was just a little street thug. But in my mind, I was part of this mafia, I was part of an internationally known triad organisation. And that's how they sell it, that's how they sell it. So, well, yeah.

The above examples discussed intra-religious shifts to religious understanding for born-Muslims, where they moved from the mosque, sect and community of their childhood to a different Muslim sect in their neighbourhood. I also discuss techniques of neutralisation that respondents used to see their involvement in crime as serving a higher purpose or to challenge a social order they regarded as illegitimate. These shifts in religious identity were linked to continued involvement in crime. In the next sub-section, I look at the conversion experience of Vin (mixed race) who converted from Rastafarianism to Islam. In this conversion narrative, conversion was linked to a period of desistance from crime. However, this was not a sustained and Vin explained his continued involvement by externalising the reasons for his involvement in crime. In this spiritual sense-making, through which he saw his involvement in crime as giving in to strong external forces of temptation and sin became important.

Conversion through peer influence

Conversion narratives can provide insight into the role and function of religion for participants' current identity construction (Maruna, Wilson and Curran 2006). Earlier studies of conversion saw conversion as a sudden and absolute change in which the previous identity was rejected in favour of a completely new and untainted identity that was regarded as superior (Rambo and Farhadian, 2014). Such explanations of conversion are not seen as relevant in explaining contemporary conversion: rather than seeing conversion as an absolute and sudden change, current research sees conversion as a 'process of constructing new identities within a context with, in some cases, starts, stops, diversions, and even reversals' (Rambo and Farhadian, 2014: 7). This definition is consistent with the description of identity change as described by Vin, who was raised as Rastafarian and converted to Islam at the age of fifteen.

During school, Vin had found Religious Education fascinating and he regularly explored spiritual philosophies. It was soon after leaving school that Vin converted to Islam: he was introduced to Islam through his older half-brother who had converted five years prior to his conversion. Vin's half-brother was his one stable and reliable relationship throughout the difficult times he experienced in childhood living with his father. His brother taught him how to defend himself against bullying in his neighbourhood; he also defended Vin against senior gang members who were threatening towards him. Around the time that Vin converted, his closest friend was killed in a gang fight. This was a significant event in his life, and he moved away from his gang after the death of his friend.

Just yesterday, I came from visiting the grave of my best friend. My best friend got shot in 2013 in his chest and died. He would have been 22 yesterday. So, you know, this is my best friend, I grew up with him from 7 years old.

Although Vin had explored many different religions, he was drawn to Islam as he felt that the teachings were closest to the faith he grew up in and that there was a sense of continuity and connection between Islam and Rastafarianism, the faith of his parents. This continuity was important for him. Recent research on conversion experiences suggests that continuities between previous identities and the new religious identity are important for converts (Nieuwkerk, 2014). Vin described his conversion as a reversion. This is a term commonly used to speak about conversion to Islam. Most converts spoke of conversion as a 'reversion,' preferring to think of themselves as 'reverts' rather than converts as they believe that Islam is the natural religion that everyone is born into (Nieuwkerk, 2014). They believe that all things that are a part of the universe, are created sinless by reverting, they are going back to this 'pure' and innocent state (Nieuwkerk, 2014).

I used to search all of these things, you know Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhist, Sikh. I studied these things. Took particular interest in RE, and I would sit down and debate with my friends who are Muslim and who are Hindu about these things. But what I lacked from them is, you know my mum as a Rasta, she used to cover her hair. And when I look at Muslim girls, they cover their hair. So straight away it was only natural for me to take instinct towards my mother, if that makes sense. And then there's certain things that men do, you know, that remind me of my

dad now. They've got beards, they don't cut their beard--my dad doesn't cut his beard. They don't drink alcohol--my dad doesn't drink alcohol. They're meant to be humble people--it's just like my dad. So there's things about Muslim men and women and their culture that remind me of my parents. So this religion, straightaway, was not too far from my nature, basically. No but that is not enough for me to make a life-changing decision. So I started studying more of the religion itself, you know, the prophets and all the Quran. And I managed to--yeah, I took Shahadah (formal conversion in front of witnesses) in 2009. I was about fifteen years old. Because I was ready to make that transition, I was ready.

After his conversion to Islam, Vin stopped smoking and selling cannabis and he moved away from his gang. For him, religion was fundamental in helping him turn his life around. He moved away from crime and was in a steady relationship.

So, you know, and my mum's Indian. Well, half Indian. So, it's like me being Caribbean and Indian, and her (partner) being Caribbean and Pakistani, is like our ethnic background was not too far. And her being born Muslim and me reverting, so that we can both learn from each other. So, I used to spend a lot of time with her and her family out at her house. We went out together, I stopped selling drugs, I used to sell perfumes, oils, some Arabic oils, fragrances, soaps, incenses. Basically, its halal money its legit money. I was basically self-employed. I was not making nowhere near as much money as I used to, but I was happy, it was all legal. I was stress-free.

After a period of being crime free, Vin was drawn back towards drugs. He described his slide back into crime as the power and pull of *fitna* – an Arabic word meaning temptation and desire. These ‘gravitational forces’ of temptation pulled him back towards his old life and he was soon back to selling drugs. Vin describes these external forces as ‘powerful’; he felt he was a helpless victim in the face of these powerful forces and succumbed by turning back to crime. Seeing involvement in crime as influenced through external forces is a technique of neutralisation which allows participants to avoid stigma.

How it all changed now is one carnival—you know Notting Hill carnival. I went there, but I didn't go into the carnival. I was on like the outskirts of the carnival. I thought, 'Yeah, there's a lot of people going out, you know, I could sell some oils, I

could sell some fragrances... But it's like, the more money I'm getting it, the more deeper, I'm going into the carnival. In Islam, we call these things fitna (temptation). All these things, you know, girls and drinking, all these, this environment, carnival is fitna, is not an environment I should have been in, because the power of it is very strong... And I stayed and get involved with everyone else in the whole carnival. And just like that [snaps fingers], that's all it took. That's all it took. That day, everything to just deteriorate right down. That's all it took. And that's how, why Muslims are the way they are, because we know these things, the power of them and what they have the ability to do, you know temptation, desire. Basically, what we are supposed to stay away from. Just like that, it was all over from me. I was back selling drugs not too long ago later... Me and this girl, we ended up breaking up. That was the final straw for me, and I kind of went worse. That's when I started getting into harder drugs, as I explained earlier.

In this section, I outlined the importance of spiritualism as a connection to a peer group. I outlined the ways in which religious teachings were drawn on to justify criminal actions (Topalli, Brezina and Bernhardt, 2013). These justifications drew on common techniques of neutralisation in which crime was a response to an illegitimate system, a response to external forces and appealing to a higher authority (Sykes and Matza, 1957).

Conclusion

Institutional and ritualistic aspects of religion became less important as participants entered adolescence. However, they continued to maintain a relational connection to religion through social roles in the family and kinship group. I discussed the complex ways in which spiritual values were used to develop techniques of neutralisation to explain continued involvement in crime. In this chapter, the relationship between religion and crime was outlined; selective use of spiritual values to justify involvement in crime was used in varying ways by the different respondents. This complex relationship between religious belonging and involvement in crime is further developed in the next two chapters.

This chapter discussed an age stage marked by change and experimentation. The main concerns during this age were maintaining close peer relationships and achieving financial independence, these are considered appropriate to the age stage (Kroger, 2000). A lack of

legitimate opportunities for respondents and the illicit openings available through peer relationships and in the neighbourhood proved to be strong pulls towards criminal involvement. Even the few who accessed university education saw themselves as disadvantaged in establishing themselves within a mainstream career. This sense of marginalisation made respondents adopt a hypermasculinity in which violence, aggression and expensive consumer goods were seen as marks of status and power. Adolescence has been described as ‘tumultuous and transformational’; clearly the changes discussed in this chapter had longer term implications for participants that continued into their adult years. This chapter concludes the discussion around the pre-prison experiences of participants (RQ1). The next chapter focuses on identity in the prison setting (RQ2).

6: Prison

Chapter Five examined changes to identity in adolescence and early adulthood. It looked at life experiences up to the first prison sentence. In this chapter, I explore changes to religious identity brought about through incarceration. The role of religion in prison dates to the birth of the prison as the first prisons at the start of the 19th century were penitentiaries which were based on religious ideals of punishment, rehabilitation and reform of prisoners (Ignatieff, 1989; Smith, 2004). Religious ideals of paying for sins and seeking redemption underpinned the emergence of these penitentiaries (Ignatieff, 1989). The importance of religion as a ‘technology of the self’, which can be employed by a person to ‘establish control of the self’, is at the centre of religious reform programmes that continue to be important in prisons (Smith 2004: 202). Furthermore, the role of religion in easing the pains of imprisonment is also well established (Clear et al., 2000). However along with this, religious renewal in prison provokes cynicism, where religious adherence is seen as a way of receiving extrinsic advantages in prison (Clear et al., 2000).

In the life stories, prison was the part of life in which religious ritual and practise became important for many of the participants. This religious practise and ritual had varying meanings for the participants. For some, spiritual sense-making and prayer was important in helping them come to terms with the traumatic and experiential change wrought by arrest and incarceration. For others, religion offered a way of taking control in an environment in which they felt abject loss of autonomy and ontological insecurity. Religious transformation could also be seen as a ‘second chance’ in which prison became an experience that led to learning, personal growth and change. By adopting a moral code, participants developed aspirational ideals of how they wished to be in the future. Religion provided a ‘blue print’ for identity change for respondents wanting to desist from crime. These uses of religion were important for both born-Muslims and converts.

In prison, both converts, and born-Muslims emphasised the importance of ‘doing’ religion on their own terms. This was an important aspect of religious identity in a context where there was diversity of Muslim sects with varying beliefs and practises. Congregational prayers and prison imams were a source of familiarity but affiliation and relationships in prison were influenced more by neighbourhood affiliations from outside prison, as well as the crime

committed. These factors from outside the prison were more important than a shared religion in developing relationships with other prisoners.

However, in some prisons, respondents felt a covert sense of Islamophobia. Within such prison environments, religious solidarity gained significance. Religious identity in this context was politicised as respondents were engaged in trying to counter the negativity they experienced. This politicisation was linked to conditions inside prison and not to any broader movement or concern. Once participants moved to prisons in which they did not encounter such hostility, the significance of religion as a collective identity became less important. The first section discusses the importance of religion in helping cope with the pains of imprisonment.

6.1. Intrinsic spirituality- Religion and the pains of imprisonment

The pains of imprisonment outlined by Gresham Sykes (1958), referred to the psychological assaults of imprisonment, which were seen to be as damaging as the physical punishment that imprisonment had replaced. The pains were related to the deprivations associated with imprisonment which include loss of autonomy, lack of goods and services, loss of familial and heterosexual relationships. The pains and degradations associated with institutional incarceration have also been outlined by Goffman in his seminal study of total institutions. More recent research outlines changes whereby a new layer has been added to the pains associated with imprisonment- that of ontological insecurity. This ‘soft power’ is exercised through constant risk assessments and uncertainty about the future (Crewe, 2011). Although current regimes are not as physically hard or isolating as prisons described by Goffman and Sykes they have a tighter ‘grip’ on prisoners due to the added layer of concern around self-identity and survival within an environment marked by insecurity and uncertainty (Crewe, 2011). In this section I discuss the use of fatalistic acceptance as well as religious ritual and a focus on developing moral worth as some of the ways in which religious beliefs, practises and moral codes were important in dealing with the pains associated with imprisonment.

A study of Islamic sense-making in the face of physical and psychological suffering outlines the utilitarian way in which suffering and trauma is explained in the Quran (Damian, Ghețu and Dura, 2016). In the Quran, experiences of physical and psychological suffering are seen as part of a Divine plan and have three main purposes: as penance for sins, as a trial or test,

and as a means of acquiring moral virtue. Hamdy (2009) outlines the agentive ways in which fatalistic acceptance of suffering is used by medical patients to come to terms with chronic illness. In her study, she found that in a situation where the effects of chronic illness and the stigma associated with it were outside participants' control, they used ideas of fatalistic acceptance to manage their lives within the confines of their illness. She argues that this fatalistic acceptance is not passive, but an orientation that requires constant work by the sufferer, in which active meaning is attached to experiences. This acceptance makes it easier for sufferers to manage their relationships and emotions in a situation that causes emotional and relationship strains.

Building on this, I argue that the research participants draw on this religious understanding of fatalistic acceptance of suffering to make sense of their prison experience with its associated psychological pains and material deprivations. I look at the importance of such sense-making in surviving prison and discuss changes to identity that are facilitated when imprisonment is seen from such a perspective. I suggest that this utilitarian understanding of suffering in Islam is useful to participants in a number of ways. It helps calm the anxiety and emotional turmoil brought about by arrest and incarceration. The focus on spiritual advancement in prison also helps offset the pains of material deprivation and personal freedom in the prison environment. It gives participants agency and focus and helps them change aspects of their identity linked to crime through a focus on building moral virtue (Williams, 2018). By focusing on their own attitude to their imprisonment, participants redefine the loss of freedom, seeing it as an opportunity for growth or a test of their moral virtue (Santos and Lane, 2014). These adaptations suggest that religion takes an important role in mitigating the pains of imprisonment,

6.11. Religious observance

Anthropological research emphasises the importance of ritual as a practise that helps individuals deal with the ambiguities and ambivalences which are a part of everyday life (Seligman *et al.*, 2008). Incarceration, particularly at the start of the sentence, can be a period of emotional trauma and stress for prisoners (Sykes 1958). The perceived stigma of arrest and conviction has an 'othering' effect in which the offender is cast out of the social body (Goffman, 1961, 1963; Foucault, 1979). This stigma of imprisonment causes dissonance in

participants' self-identity. The separation between their criminal life and life within their families and communities, which participants went to great lengths to preserve, is disrupted by the public shame of arrest and incarceration. In such circumstances, religious practise helped participants to manage stress and to gain a sense of control. Using their time in prison to pray offered participants a way to reclaim their identity as having spiritual worth. Praying is a way of seeking forgiveness, by constant prayers participants felt they could purify themselves of the shame of imprisonment.

Immad⁴¹, British Pakistani, described completely moving away from praying and practising religion from the age of eleven up to the time that he was arrested at the age of twenty-one. After his arrest, particularly at the start of his incarceration, he found that praying constantly calmed him and helped him adjust to life inside prison. Religious avoidance as a coping mechanism involves the use of prayer and spiritual learning as a distracting activity which helps in shifting the focus away from a distressing event or situation (Santos and Lane, 2014).

So, when I went back to jail (after the court hearing and sentence) and I thought, because when they give me five years, I was looking at the cell and I thought 'am I doing five years in this room? I'm never coming back to jail again.' But then I thought 'I'm never even gonna get out, five years is a long time' Yeah, it (prison) was shit. It wasn't, I mean it wasn't, I was a bit sad at first, so I started reading my namaaz (obligatory prayers) again so I thought 'Right this is better, I feel better now'. So, I started reading my namaaz, started reading my namaaz and I just started reading so much that I felt a change if you know what I mean.

Current day imprisonment is marked by the sense of ontological insecurity facing prisoners and a loss of autonomy. These associated psychological frustrations were most acutely felt by participants (Crewe, 2011). Religious coping is seen as particularly salient in dealing with situations which are not in an individual's control (Pargament et al., 1990). Immad felt that praying led to positive outcomes for him in impossible and uncertain situations. Through his prayers, he felt he could influence the outcome of decisions over which he had no real control. This became an important resource for him in managing his time in prison.

⁴¹ Immad, age 37, British Pakistani, Sufi-Muslim, conviction for assault and credit card fraud, longest prison term: 5 years.

And then, like I can remember once when I used to pray a lot and I used to say to my mate “why don’t you just read your salah (prayers) and read your Quran it’ll help ya?” He said “oh, it’s not gonna help me”. I goes, “All right”. Then the Monday he was telling me about some jail, ‘It’s a good jail that but you won’t go there because you’re on the list to go to another jail’ and I thought “Ya Allah I wanna go to that jail, please send me there” so I read my namaaz (obligatory prayers) done my dua (prayers). So, one morning I’ve got up and because I had further charges for making cards, cloning them and what have ya and if you’ve got other charges they don’t move you out the jail because it’s a local jail. So, what’s happened, one day I’ve gone down and he goes “what’s your name?” I goes, “Immad”, he goes “what’s your number?” I still remember the number believe it or not. And he goes “Right, pack your stuff, you’re going to that jail in Rochdale.” So, I go “I think you’ve got it wrong, I’ve got further charges, officer.” He goes “No” he goes “You’re going, you this this this...” because they’re a bit cocky, the officers, so I says, “Right.” So, I’ve gone upstairs and I says to my pad mate, “I told you to read your namaaz (prayers) and ask and you get it”, I go “Anyway I’m going, mate” he goes “You’ve got further charges” I goes “I know but they’re still sending me.

While Immad attributed things going in his favour due to his prayers, seeing God as the active agent influencing events in his life also made it easier for him to accept day to day setbacks (also in Clear *et al.*, 2000).

I started messing about again – smoking weed, getting drugs and selling them – then I thought ‘This is wrong, I shouldn’t be doing this, I can get punished again’ and then next thing you know they put me in GOAD which is ‘Good Order and Discipline.’ Think I was in there for about three and a half months, in isolation but I started liking it ‘cause I’d read my namaaz (prayers) no one would do me head in, I’d be able to go outside and exercise for one hour, I’d have me shower every day. So I thought ‘This is all right, What did I start messing about for?’ so I started praying again to God, ‘Help me.’ so then they moved me from that jail to Doncaster, some jail, it’s for all drop outs and nuisances, they put you into this one jail so when I got there I thought ‘I don’t like it here, why in that jail they were saying “You can’t get out of this jail, no one gets out this jail, once you’re here, you’re here” I thought that’s not possible, I

thought I'll get out InshAllah (God willing) so started reading my namaaz and again one day they goes "What's your name?", I said "Immad." "Right, you're going to Risley", I couldn't believe it but that, they goes "You're going tomorrow."

Religious practise and spirituality can be 'hooks' for change (Giordano *et al.*, 2008). Religion is a resource which helps with emotional coping; this makes it a useful means for changing negative behaviours brought about as a response to stressful situations, such as anger or substance misuse as a response to stress (Clear *et al.*, 2000). For Waqar⁴² prison was a space to reflect on his uncontrolled anger. He had been getting into trouble due to his angry outbursts from a young age (six-years-old). He was eighteen years old when he was convicted of robbery and possession of drugs. In prison, he taught himself calming techniques which helped him manage his anger so that it would not escalate.

I think it's that. Because like in jo (jail), I used to see like, I don't know, jo you're by yourself so you think a lot, you think too much. there's a lot of things I was thinking about in jail that I started to implement myself, like calm down, doing all this stuff. So, that's basically what helped me.

Public ritual, even when performed in isolation, is considered a way of connecting with a larger social collective (Seligman *et al.*, 2008). In particular, it is considered a way of connecting to family and ancestors (Seligman *et al.*, 2008). This connection between religion and family is quite striking in the life story accounts, where discussions around religion were almost always linked to social roles and family relationships. While participants prayed inside prison, they were conscious that their close family members would also be praying for them outside. This sense of connectedness was especially important for South Asian participants, who saw their own prayer and their family's prayers for them as an important resource which influenced events to work out in their favour. Seeing God (and family) as a partner or source of support in a situation of uncertainty or stress helped with emotional coping (Pargament *et al.*, 1990; Santos and Lane, 2014). Abdullah⁴³ was arrested while in possession of a very large quantity of drugs, his barrister had warned him that he could end

⁴² Waqar, age 21, African- Somali, Salafi, conviction for drug dealing and robbery, longest prison term: 11 months.

⁴³ Abdullah, 44, British Pakistani, Sufi- Muslim, conviction for drug dealing, longest prison term: 2 years.

up serving an eight-year sentence. While in prison, Abdullah found prayers helpful in managing time. He had a well thought out routine which was organised around prayer times.

I did namaaz (obligatory prayer) full time. I was shocked cause I never read namaaz, only jummah (Friday prayers). I found time for namaaz, that was like 'Wow!' it takes that - to be locked up to get your namaaz five time. So, you know that was one thing what kept me focused. So, it was like namaaz, reading all my namaaz, kept me focused as well.

For some participants, imprisonment offered them the opportunity to re-learn prayers and teachings which they had forgotten. Imran⁴⁴ re-learnt how to do the five obligatory Muslim prayers during his sentence.

Do you know what, to be honest with you prison is where I did learn a lot like even my namaaz (obligatory prayer) I learnt it in prison I'll be honest with ya, even in prison. So once I did learn it and I obviously it just, I knew it I just, that was it I was praying in jail... There was a lad on the wing on the billet and he give me the full namaaz book so I just started and then that was it, I mean within I couldn't believe it 'cause within like, it was within two, three days really it just come inside and I just after that it was there erm yeah.

Imran felt that praying helped him pass the time in prison more quickly. Loneliness due to being in the cell or in solitary confinement, and the dull, routine nature of life in prison made prayer easier and more attractive.

I don't know. I don't know it's just 'cause you've got so much times on your hands, you got so much times 'cause certain jails you're locked up for 22, 21 hours in your cell so in that time what can you be doing in your cell? Obviously as Muslims I don't know it's the right thing to do I think innit, really because obviously we're believers, we believe so I mean obviously not everyone in jail does it but for me personally that's what I felt was right and that's what made my time pass easily, easily yeah.

⁴⁴ Imran, age 30, British Pakistan, Sufi, two convictions for assault, longest prison term: 2 years.

Religious prayer and learning helped participants deal with the mundanity, routine and loneliness of time in prison. Prayers also provided a sense of control to deal with the ontological insecurity of time in prison. This focus on prayer and religious learning was in stark contrast to the respondents' lives outside prison where religious rituals and learning were not an aspect of everyday life.

6.12. Religion as a 'blue print' for change:

Research on the significance of religion in prison suggests that the importance of religion in prison is most appealing as a way of redefining life goals and to rebuild family relationships (Santos and Lane, 2014). The prison experience is gendered (Jewkes, 2005); in responding to the pains of imprisonment, some offenders adopt a 'hypermasculinity' through the changes to identity wrought in the prison environment (Jewkes, 2005). However along with this, prisons offer the space for reflection in which prisoners can develop aspirational identities related to the social roles they occupy outside prison (Jewkes, 2005; Phillips, 2012b). This reflection and reordering of goals and relationships gave purpose to time spent in prison and offered participants a 'second chance' (Clear *et al.*, 2000; Maruna, Wilson and Curran, 2006; Giordano *et al.*, 2008). By adopting a moral code, participants could develop aspirational ideals of how they wished to be in the future. Prison became an experience which could lead to learning, personal growth and change by focusing on self-improvement. Religious teachings were seen as a 'blue print' for how to develop into a pro-social changed individual (Giordano *et al.*, 2008).

The long hours spent in solitude inside prison gave participants the time to reflect on their life and relationships outside prison. Participants used religious teachings and moral codes to order their behaviour with friends and family, as well as to develop more holistic ambitions for themselves which were not just based on material goals. Changes in relationships that occurred due to imprisonment and critical events in their families, such a death of a family member, affected their time in prison quite significantly. As discussed earlier, traumatic events can be regarded as moments of moral learning and can become turning points through which participants can want to change their identity completely.

Born Muslims

Along with a sense of insecurity about their futures, loss of family relationships was the aspect of imprisonment that participants spoke about the most. Two significant events occurred during Abdullah's (British Pakistani) prison sentence that changed his perception of his criminal past. The first change occurred immediately after his arrest: a change in his relationships. Family members and friends that Abdullah considered close relationships started disassociating themselves from him. Some of these friends had regularly used Abdullah's access to night clubs and money to enjoy themselves. This made him reassess his previous lifestyle and relationships as superficial and based on 'use and abuse'. Abdullah's involvement in crime was hidden from his community; there were rumours about his involvement in crime, but these were disregarded as he was very good at maintaining social relationships in his community. The loss of these relationships due to the stigma of imprisonment was a very big blow for him.

It opens your eyes, prison, 'cause you know who your friends are. You know, you see the changes in the people who you know, the past, even when you get to know everybody for the real, who they are. So, it opens your eyes and makes you think 'Wow!' 'cause you know you're on that level here and then when you come down and you get dropped, you get to see the ones who you never cared about or you never cared, you get to see that they're the only ones there and the ones who were there, they were only around there for the money, probably. You know, greed innit. You just get to realise who your friends are and who are not, who comes to visit you, you know who cares, type of thing.

The other significant event that had a deep impact on Abdullah was the death of his father who just a week before Abdullah was to be released. This affected Abdullah quite deeply. His release from prison was overshadowed by the loss of his father. After his death, as the eldest son, Abdullah felt that he now had to take on his father's role as the head of his family.

I always knew because I used to go to his chemotherapies I used to take him and I used to be in all his appointments, I was his carer. So I was very on it like that. It wasn't all about ayashi (having fun), it was about family comes first as well. So, I did do my fair share. So yeah, I knew he had cancer, but it went away and it came back,

but it came back while I was in prison. Then I become a bit frustrated, but I just focused. 'Cause I used to speak to him every day on the phone, so I just tried 'I need to get through it, I need to get through it, I need to get through it'... You have to give to them (family) a bit of, that feeling, you know, I'm here, don't worry – that type of thing. But experience, like I said, I can't say good or bad, but I've taken something from it, haven't I? I've learnt something, value of money, value of life, value of time, value of everything, errm value of friendships, everything to be honest with you. It's changed my life to be honest with you. They say there's two things in life: you learn something, or you don't. I think I learnt something you know. So I can say yeah it was good but then I don't want to say that as well as the same time. But you know my situation, I'm in a bit of a situation there but yeah.

After his father's death, Abdullah wanted to take on the role his father had in his life by being a positive role model for his children.

I can't explain that it's hard but I know who I am, I know what I am but I don't wanna be known as a gangster, do you know, understand I mean? I don't want my kids to know I'm a gangster I don't want them 'yeah dad did this dad did that.' My dad never even smoked in his life... You know my dad pushed these people's hearts you know.

Loss of contact with children due to imprisonment was an especially painful aspect of imprisonment for many of the participants. Of the deprivations of imprisonment, this curtailing of their social roles within their family were the most distressing memories that stayed with the participants even many years after their release. They could deal with the distress of these unhappy memories, which brought back feelings of guilt, shame, frustration and sadness, by remembering these events as learning experiences which led to positive outcomes for them in the future. Ahmed⁴⁵ (British Bangladeshi) was married with three children; for him, the main deprivation inside prison was loss of contact with his family. In the time leading up to his offending, Ahmed had started viewing his wife and children as a burden: he was frustrated as he felt his only role in their life was as the financial provider. After his incarceration, Ahmed no longer occupied this role. This shift in his role and the time he had to reflect while in prison had made Ahmed re-evaluate his life.

⁴⁵ Ahmed, age 45, British Bangladeshi, Sunni, conviction for paedophilia, longest prison term, 2 years.

When I was growing up mum and dad made me do my prayers and I rebelled against that, I stopped doing my prayers deliberately just because they made me do it before, and then I found it difficult going back to my prayers erm there's been times in my life where I've lost faith altogether and I thought there can't be God out there but I've always ended up coming back to God and saying 'Yes there is a superpower out there, there's got to be an afterlife.' I just refuse to accept the fact that one day I will die and I will be extinguished and that's it, I'm no more. I just refuse to accept that fact, it's a bit big headed of me but I just refuse to accept that yeah, just like a flame I'll go out and there's nothing else for me, it just doesn't equate; so I've always had the relationship with God if you like just sometimes I tended to—and every time I've tended to stray away from that I've found myself in trouble.

Ahmed spent time in prison reworking his understanding of religion. Developing his own understanding of religion was important for him as it helped see himself as autonomous from his father. He felt that religion had given him the confidence to find his own path.

I was, you know since the age of three, my dad started teaching me to read the Quran, do my salah (prayers) and I was never allowed to question. Whereas obviously as I grew older, my dad let me question things and he encouraged it but it was question other people, not him, so. But now I've got to the stage you know, as far as I'm concerned if, even if the world's renowned scholar came up to me and said "this is different to what you've been doing", I have the confidence to say, "I'll only follow your guidance if you can provide evidence for this, if you can't provide evidence and logic, I'm not listening to you and I don't care that you're you know, you're the world's foremost authority on this, it's not relevant to me" so that's something my religion has taught me is, question it, doesn't matter who provides you with it, get—question it get the views on it, get their opinions and get their evidence, if they can't provide evidence then you know, you don't have to follow it so...

Ahmed saw his prison sentence as atonement for his crime. Before he was arrested, he had been overwhelmed with feelings of guilt and fear of divine punishment. By completing his sentence, he felt that he had paid the price for his crime and could move forward.

I kind of wanted to do my prison sentence anyway, this was before, so when I'd gone to Umrah I kind of realised I needed to do my time erm because the way I saw it if I done prison sentence here then maybe I don't get a double sentence in the afterlife. Whereas if I don't get punished in this world then I'll definitely get punished in the afterlife. I just didn't fancy afterlife punishment so it's like yeah prison two years, four years, ten years whatever, it's done, whereas outside you know that's meant to be eternal yeah eternal punishment's not very appealing to be honest.

Trying to turn something negative – imprisonment – into something positive was a theme that was repeated by many of the participants. By focusing on self-improvement, Naveed⁴⁶ (British Pakistani) wanted to transform the negative experience of a prison sentence into something positive or life affirming. Naveed's father died while he was in prison. In talking of his childhood, he had spoken of his father's violence and abuse towards him and his mother. Being in prison had given Naveed the distance and space to 'make peace' with his father. His father's death was a turning point after which Naveed became more serious about life. Naveed's father had wanted him to do well academically. In prison, he re-took his A Levels and completed a degree in Sociology and Criminology. He felt that by completing his degree in prison, he had lived up to his father's expectations. Along with his degree, he also did qualifications in music, gym and youth mentoring. In secondary school, Naveed had written rap songs to deal with his experience of bullying. In prison, he went back to this and started writing rap lyrics again.

The birth of a child is another turning point which can lead to drastic changes in behaviour (Moloney *et al.*, 2009; Meek, 2011). During his second sentence Imran made the decision to desist from crime and linked this to the birth of his daughter. This decision to desist was linked to a religious change as well, where Imran started seriously following a Sheikh.

I don't think it was prison. I think what changed me was obviously when I had my kid. This is what I'm saying obviously I had that phase where any little thing I'd get involved for anyone, if anyone was in trouble I'd help them or try helping them or then I'd end up fighting for them or something so it's when obviously when I went jail, in jail you think 'cause that's what you're doing you're thinking, "What's the

⁴⁶ Naveed, age 40, British Pakistani, Sunni, conviction for murder

cause of it?” and it was really nothing. So obviously then when I had my daughter and all that, really after this second-- about three years ago when I went in three, four years ago after that, that’s it, from then on I’ve just— see like after this jail sentence this is when I’ve really met like Sheikh Itisham and from there it’s just switched. I can’t really explain how it’s happened but it’s just switched. I don’t know.

All the life stories discussed in this section point to the importance of turning a traumatic experience, such as imprisonment, into an experience of learning and growth. The loss of social roles was the deprivation that was most acutely felt by participants. This loss led to reflection and the development of aspirations to re-order life after release from prison in order to prioritise important relationships. Next, I look at the experience of the five converts to Islam. Four of the participants saw their prison experience as playing an important role in their conversion to Islam. I discuss their conversion experience and the importance of religion during their time in prison following their conversion.

Converts

Religious renewal or conversion in prison provokes cynicism as the sudden change from ‘sinner to saint’ seems ‘too convenient to be believable’ (Maruna, Wilson and Curran, 2006). Rather than focusing on the conversion narratives as ‘factual’, their value lies in the insight they provide into current identity. Conversion narratives are seen as myth-making in which ‘autobiographical reinterpretation’ works as a transformational tool to reconcile past events with current disposition (Maruna, Wilson and Curran, 2006). Within the prison context, religious conversion has particular significance as a device for managing the shame of a past criminal identity (Maruna, Wilson and Curran, 2006). Conversion narratives play an important role in creating a new identity which replaces the past criminal identity and gives the convert meaning and purpose to their time in prison (Spalek and El-Hassan, 2007). Research suggests that the most significant changes related to conversion are changes to personal goals and identity (Maruna, Wilson and Curran, 2006). Most religious texts provide a ‘total system of living’; this can be particularly attractive for prisoners whose previous choices are in question due to the mortifications of imprisonment.

Religious conversion to Islam raises concerns as an indicator of radicalisation (Liebling, Arnold and Straub, 2011). However radicalisation as a term is conceptually weak and riddled

with ambiguities (Neumann, 2013). A better term to discuss changes to religious identity is Islamist: Islamism is seen as a politicisation of religion (Iqtidar, 2011). Islamist Muslims regard working towards bringing about political change as an aspect of their faith. Important characteristics of Islamists include a strong in-group identity with similarly politically minded Muslims. They tend to dehumanise all non-Muslims and non-political Muslims as 'other'. Not all Islamist Muslims support violence, yet their ideas of political change and strong in-group bonding can lead to a fragmentation of the prison population.

In assessing conversion narratives, it would be useful to assess the extent to which narrative focused on bringing about political change rather than personal change, as well as to see the focus of their ideas of political change and how they match up to ideas underpinning modernity (see Casanova, 2011). In the conversion stories discussed below, participants were more concerned with changes to their disposition and changing social relationships rather than a broader social concern. However, politicised religious orientations are not completely absent, in the prison context and are discussed later in the chapter.

Four of the participants converted either in prison or shortly after release. Ammar (Black Caribbean) and Ali (White Irish) converted to Islam in prison, while Dawood (mixed race: Roma and French) and Steve (mixed race: Guyana and Montenegro) became interested in Islam in prison and converted shortly after release. I draw from these life stories to discuss the significance of conversion to Islam in prison.

Ammar (Black Caribbean, serving sentence for armed robbery) became interested in Islam during his time in prison at the age of fifteen. This was his first prison sentence and his mother tried to influence him to turn his life around and started sending him books about the civil rights movement. These books became an important influence on his identity at this age.

'My mum started to send me some decent literature, so she started to send people like Angela Davis, Steve Biko, Malcolm X. When I was about 19 she sent Malcolm X and that's when I became Muslim. As a result of reading his story, seeing parallels between myself and what he was known as then was Detroit red'.

Ammar did not have a religious childhood; his mother believed in God but encouraged him to discover his own spiritual path. With friends, he spent some time with a Pentecostal church, but this was for a short period. Ammar asked his mother for an English translation of the

Quran. He read the English translation of the first chapter of the Quran and decided to convert to Islam. Ammar did not have a formal conversion and did not make a pledge to an imam. He had limited knowledge about Islam and he had no idea if there was a broader Muslim community or imam in prison at that time. His commitment was a personal one and largely influenced by ideas of Islam he picked from his book about Malcolm X and the parts of the Quran that he read.

Ammar had converted towards the end of his sentence. Once he was outside prison, he found it hard to remain committed to Islam and stopped considering himself a Muslim a few months after release. Ammar reconnected with Islam much later in his life however he regarded this early introduction to Islam as significant. After his first prison sentence at the age of fifteen, Ammar's involvement in crime kept increasing. He served several sentences for armed robbery and violent assaults. Ammar described himself as a 'key player' – his status as a 'dominant player' in his area translated into respect and contacts in prison. Once he was out of prison he could use these new contacts to increase his involvement in crime.

When I would get arrested, what happens is you're put on a wing, a unit with 180 other guys from all areas of London. And most of those guys, in most cases, are key players in whichever area of London they're in. Now if you're one of the most dominant of those set of key players, once you come out in the community, almost gives you access to go anywhere and do pretty much what you want because people know that this is the level that you operate at. So that's what was happening. So, when I got to nineteen, I was already quite a significant player and that just developed and developed and developed even more until I got a position where I operated 20-25 guys who were absolutely committed because of the results that I was getting for them'.

It was at the age of twenty-eight that Ammar formally converted to Islam. He was serving another prison sentence and became reinterested in Islam through the influence of his Moroccan Muslim girlfriend. Ammar met his girlfriend a few weeks before his arrest. Although he was reluctant to maintain a relationship while serving an eight-year sentence, his girlfriend was persistent. She kept in touch through letters and came to see him regularly during his time in prison.

My journey re-ignited my faith and at that time my ex-wife helped with that. Because there were questions that I would ask, there were things that were shared, the Ramadhan(s) came around, the Eid(s) came around, we'd both be fasting, I'd be learning more. Then I came home, I made my decision and I married her. I didn't hesitate, I just married her. And she came to live with me. And we were met with challenges that you would expect. You know the difficulties of adjusting, adjusting to society, adjusting with my new lifestyle, adjusting with conveying them effectively to ex-peers.

After Ammar completed the four years of his sentence in prison, he got married. He and his wife were prominent and respected members of their local Muslim community. Through her, Ammar developed a new group of Muslim friends. These were mainly Arab and Middle Eastern Muslims in his neighbourhood, some of whom he knew from his childhood. These friends were not involved in crime and so Ammar developed a social network which was separate from his criminal network of friends and associates. Ammar however still kept in touch with his old associates and continued to offend. He was now involved in high level armed robberies and only committed two or three offences in a year. He earned enough to live the glamorous lifestyle he aspired to.

Ammar described this period in his life as 'conflicted'. In the previous chapter I discussed the use of techniques of neutralisation to reconcile religious values with involvement in crime. Ammar used similar techniques of neutralisation to justify his involvement in crime while being a part of a religious community. He kept his involvement in crime hidden from his Muslim friends. Since Ammar used to rob armoured vehicles, he saw his crimes as victimless crimes. He also felt crime was a way of putting the system right, what he called 'social engineering'. He was taking money from rich corporations and dividing it with other people who worked with him. They were all encouraged to use the money on 'pro-social' activities. Seeing his crimes as 'victimless' and regarding his crimes as a response to an unjust system are both commonly used techniques of neutralisation (Sykes and Matza, 1957).

I found that this material acquisition, I used to use it as barometer of where I was at in life. I don't sell drugs I only take from these large bank corporations - HSBC, NatWest, all of these banks. So, I kind of hierarchically put myself above the dirty drug dealers, the burglars, and these other people and I don't socialise with.

Only fifteen months into his marriage Ammar was arrested again. The circumstances of his final arrest had a profound influence on him. He was almost killed in the police encounter. Furthermore, at the time of his arrest Ammar was thirty-three years old. His lifestyle outside prison was very different now: he was married, a homeowner, his wife was expecting their first child. Going to prison did not seem business as usual to him. Ammar was given a fifteen-year indeterminate sentence and he knew this meant that he could spend the next thirty years in prison. He decided to move away from crime when the night Sargent brought him a picture of his wife's first antenatal scan. It was the first time he saw his daughter.

So I mean, when I got to the police station I made a tauba (repentance) in that cell that, 'Wallahi (By Allah), I don't think I can ever make again. I mean sometimes I was in such a state for twenty minutes, the tears would be drying on the floor and I said to Allah (SWT) if I get through this situation all I really want to do is to work in your service and to serve my community, that's the only thing I want to do. I didn't know how it was gonna happen, Lamia honestly, I didn't. But I just knew that was what I wanted at that point. And as a result of what happened is when I got into the prison system I just began to really focus on myself and reconnect with my faith.

Ammar had seen his involvement in crime as driven by external desires. He felt that focusing on religion freed him from his dependence on assessing his life in material terms.

I'm just trying to give you a whole picture of how this situation spirals until you have no control over it and you're driven by these desires, because you're always going to be a slave to something. You decide whether you're going to be a slave for Allah (SWT) or your desires. That's what I found; I found that this material acquisition I used to use it as barometer of where I was at in life.

Scriptural language, can play an important role in assisting in the development of a new self-narrative (Maruna, Wilson and Curran, 2006). Ammar focused on 'akhlaq', an Arabic term meaning disposition, morals or manners. He explained it as a shift in which he started seeing his action as having social consequences along with seeing himself as someone with personal responsibilities.

First and foremost, it affected my, akhlāq, my conduct, how I viewed my environment and how I interacted with that environment. It affected my speech, how I engage with people. I listened more and responded better as a result of listening more. I understood that there is gonna be a time when I'm gonna be standing in front of Allah (SWT) and I'm gonna have to answer to all of this. So, I have to make muhasiba and there's a beautiful saying of Umar ibn al Khattab radiallahu 'anhu who said: *speaks Arabic* "Bring yourself to account before you are brought to account. And weigh your deeds before your deeds are weighed because verily the bringing yourself to account today is far simpler and far easier than the reckoning that you will face tomorrow" so my understanding developed as I began to understand the language. I became more engaged with the ayaat of Quran, I had a lot of time to reflect in the early hours when everybody's sleeping. And I really developed my relationship with Allah (SWT) and that had a huge impact on my family relationships, you know my relationship with my daughter, my view of my environment and how I fitted into that and my responsibility that I had and it changed.

Similar to Ammar, Dawood⁴⁷'s first introduction to Islam was many years before he made the decision to formally convert. In childhood, Dawood had been part of an Islamic mosque due to his friendship with Asian boys in his neighbourhood. He moved away from the mosque in adolescence and his peer group also changed. Despite these changes, he continued to regard himself as Muslim and prayed occasionally. During a prison sentence he was serving for violent assault, he became interested in Islam again. Dawood also saw his formal conversion as a moment of change in which he was committing to changing his life by staying on 'the straight path.'

No, I never been asked to take shahada (formal pledge) or anything like that. I knew everythin' but nobody ever said 'oh take shahada' or anything like this and I don't know, and like I said when I went started at high school, slowly, slowly started, I was going less and less and less till I wasn't goin' at all and like I said a good few years went and I never been nowhere near the masjid. So, like I said then after that time when I got outta jail. I started doin' bits in jail and stuff like that but I thought there no

⁴⁷ Dawood, age 31, White (Roma and French), Sufi-Muslim (convert), conviction for assault and drug dealing, longest prison term: 18 months.

way I'm ever gonna be one of them people that just converts in jail because it's just, I don't know it's something that people do, I just don't know but I didn't wanna do it. And then like I said when I got out I had a really strange dream and I just interpret it as— obviously I'm no dream interpreter but I just interpret it that you need to go back to the mosque and just sort your life out. Just back on sirat-e-mustaquim (the straight path).

As discussed earlier, one aspect of identity disrupted by prison is the different social roles participants occupied outside prison. Imprisonment can lead to social isolation, where relationships with significant others outside prison can fall apart due to incarceration. In this context, religious conversion offers the opportunity to make a new set of social relationships and bonds. Ali, a white Irish catholic convert, was convicted for attempted murder during his involvement in a gang fight in which he severely injured one of the members of the opposing gang. For the first half of his sentence, Ali still considered himself to be a part of his gang outside; he did not engage with anyone inside prison as he did not feel the need for new relationships. He wanted to get through his sentence as quickly as possible to re-join his gang after release. It was during the second half of his sentence that Ali started reflecting on the effects of his involvement in gangs on his relationships and identity.

I think after four years though I started to become really, really drained, erm I started to realise you know what I can't keep doing this going around in circles, circles, circles, circles, circles and I think that's when I started to really look for something you know look for something, look for you know anything to do. I started reading a lot because I've always loved reading... I started reading history, philosophies, started reading erm martial arts philosophies, we weren't allowed martial art books so you know the philosophy and you know the book on [unclear]. I was kind of on this little mad journey.

At the time of his arrest, Ali was in a steady relationship and his girlfriend was pregnant. His son was born while he was in prison. Ali had a troubled relationship with his girlfriend: He had married her after his arrest so that she would not be able to testify against him in court. After his conviction, his relationship with his wife deteriorated further and after a time she stopped bringing his son to meet him in prison. Ali really struggled to come to terms with this loss of contact with his son. While he was in prison, his ex-wife started a new relationship

and her new partner had taken over the role of 'father' to his son. Although Ali understood he could not be a father to his son from inside prison, he was distraught at his complete absence in his son's life. Ali also had very little contact with his mother during his time in his gang. He had run away from home at the age of sixteen and had become very distant from his childhood neighbourhood and his family. His occasional contact with his mother came to an abrupt end at the time of his arrest. Ali's mother was horrified at his crimes and refused to talk to him.

Ali met a member of his gang inside prison: this friend had converted to Islam and he started discussing his new religion with him.

When I moved to [name] it was really funny. I was in the gym and someone called my name, but my street name and I've never had my street named called you know? And someone called my street name and I spun around and I see this Chinese guy standing there looked like, and I don't recognise 'cause I haven't seen anyone from my past for years you know. And we ended up chatting, found out what wing he was on. But I didn't know he was a Muslim at the time and then we used to go on the same exercise yard together and he's hit me with the Dawah (the practise of conveying the message of Islam to non-believers⁴⁸)... yeah (laughs) he'd hit me with the Dawah.

Along with his interest in Islam, Ali started exploring other religions as well. During this time, he kept moving prisons; he met other Muslim offenders and continued to find out about Islam. Ali spent more than a year researching on Islam and other religions before he decided to convert.

Before Islam I was very much into Buddhism, I even got... I was trying to investigate my roots as an Irish bloke, I was trying to get into the... paganist religions that pre-dates the kinda Celtic. I realised that there was no evidence for what they— 95-99 % of what they say is all made up, because no one knows what the true stuff is, no one knows what the ancient pagans really worshipped so it's all guess work, so I thought, I quickly left that but I got into Buddhism for a while. I enjoyed Buddhism, meditating, I still meditate now but just with a different focus. Yeah, got in Tai Chi

⁴⁸ <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/dawah>

and that kinda thing. Yeah, that was you, the period before taking my shahada that was, I was just sick and tired and I thought to myself, there must be more, there must be more to life than just getting out there doing what you want to do and dying and then becoming food for worms, it just didn't make sense to me. Never has. To be honest.

Ali was moved to HMP Grendon, a therapeutic community prison. Here he spent time working on the reasons for his involvement in crime. He revisited childhood memories of abuse and violence which were a part of his childhood spent with his father. He started realising the impact of the violence he had experienced in his childhood on his current state of mind. It was after leaving HMP Grendon that he decided to convert to Islam. Like Ammar, Ali also felt the religion helped him re-order his priorities to focus more on being compassionate rather than being caught up in maintaining the 'image' of a gangster. He also used scriptural language to explain changes in his identity.

The concept of Touheed, that oneness of Allah, that gives me personally an innocence because I know that nothing on this earth in its essence you know, in this essence, on a dunya (worldly) level if you like, on an existence level of course it matters, your family, your life, what you're doing but in its essence itself, so you don't need to be so hung up on what you have and what you don't have. I don't need to be— you know before it was all about you know what was I wearing, how was I looking, am I smoking enough weed you know and it's all about trying to have this exterior you know. There's a classic thing with gangsters yeah, especially street thugs like myself, we all look the part but we're lucky if we have a fiva in our pockets at times. But as long as you look the part... and the total reverse of Islam is that you may look like nothing but your condition with the Lord may be something bigger and being a revert is about Islam gives you, you have to have compassion you know, if you don't have compassion you can't be a very good Muslim, you have to have compassion for people whether they're Muslim or non-Muslim it's respectable, they're human beings. Prophet Muhammad said, He is a mercy for all Mankind, and you know if you look at that one statement, all Mankind is a mercy in essence. So, it's about how do I conduct 'cause I'm very, very aware that my behaviour, again yeah it's almost like a stocking mechanism you know, that my behaviour will reflect on how people view my faith.

Yeah what I do in my life now has a direct impact on how people will view a Muslim you know.

For Ali conversion became an impetus for reconnecting with his mother.

I was writing to her in Cyprus. She lived in Cyprus at the time and it was the tone of my letters my mum says, she could see the change in my letters. Just the way I was speaking, the way I was talking, the way I was acting... and we started talking on the phone, and then she'd come up and visit me. And she saw the shift. She saw it. Mothers know don't they? She saw, she saw the shift in me.

Ali's conversion to Islam offered him the opportunity to rebuild his relationship with his mother and to form new relationships through marriage. It represented a 'second chance'.

When I married my wife that was another turning point, because she had a daughter and I went into it, God knows this, knowing well that she would become my responsibility and I am not going to get out of prison and cause chaos into her little life. It's not just about me and her mum, it's also about her and I'm not going to do that. And that's what a lot of it was, it was... my wife and my daughter saved me from coming out and going and doing... and Islam yes. You know Islam is something that's always been there but you still have to live in the practical world you know, life is still hard and it's still difficult. You can't even... I think people idealise it a little bit too much and don't realise that there still some very real problems that need to be overcome, and hurdles... you know.

Ammar, Dawood and Ali described their conversion as a moral change in which they saw their conversion as a decision to change their life towards pro-social goals and values. In contrast to this, Steve⁴⁹ became curious about Islam through seeing different Muslim communities. He became interested in Islam during his time in YOI Feltham where he spent nine-months on remand. There were a lot of Muslim prisoners there and Steve started asking them about their faith.

⁴⁹ Steve is a mixed race (mother from Guyana and father from Montenegro) convert, twenty-three years old, living in North London.

Oh it's something that's been, like I said, in prison, it's a lot of Muslims, you know. But I never really asked about it. Obviously, because everyone is talking about everyone reverting, reverting, reverting. Like I said, when I first came out, even before then, in prison, asking questions, just little questions here and there.

Steve was enrolled in college at the time of his arrest. Although he only spent time in prison on remand, he did not continue with college after his release. After his release, he continued to find out more about Islam from a group of Muslims on his estate. He described the group of Muslims on this estate as a 'family'. Steve did not see his conversion as a drastic change; he was raised Catholic and so he already had a basis on which he further built his faith. In talking about his interest in Islam, Steve focused on community rather than specific teachings or values that he had acquired. The group of Muslims on his estate were a new social group for him which was not connected to his involvement in crime. Religion can become a way of accessing a new social group which is different to the relationships that led to an involvement in crime (Giordano *et al.*, 2008).

So, like I said, I knew a lot of brothers that had been on Acton estate, very good community, lot of Muslim people there, good brothers, good families, you know. And like I said, it's just like--I guess I was drawn to that kind of like, that sense of like, it's like family to a certain extent, you know? Like brothers you know, look out for one another. Obviously, even this certain prophet that not Muslim⁵⁰ but they grew up with them so they don't treat them any different but you know, there's sort of that sense of unity. That drew me towards Islam. Like I said, I'd been discouraged by a lot of people I know just doing a job to just revert and that's it. But I studied it a little bit, read the Quran a little bit. Like I said, I had doubts. Not doubts, but like questions I wanted to ask. And they was answered. And like I said, it felt right for me, so I did it. My mum always supported me...

Steve saw his conversion as significant in helping him re-order his life by making new positive relationships. He stopped using drugs and took up playing football along with going

⁵⁰ May be referring to the close relationship that Prophet Mohammad had with his uncle Abu Talib who was his guardian but did not convert to Islam.

to the gym regularly. He also found work with a removal company. However, this was a contractual job; when his contract ended, Steve started selling drugs to make money. He served a second nine-month prison sentence at the age of twenty-two for drug dealing. In prison Steve started to pray again.

In prison, being around brothers as well, reading books, so not just Islamic books, just books in general—I love to read and it's just, I used the time. I tried to use the time constructively, you know, not just sit down idly, you know, just participating in things... wanted to come try and elevate myself.

The conversion narratives outline the different conversion journeys that participants describe which led them to changing their religion to Islam. Participants focus on different aspects of faith as being important for them. For Ammar, Dawood and Ali, religion was important as a moral code through which they could reorder their social relationships and personal goals. Steve was attracted to Islam through the strong social bonds he noted amongst Muslims on his estate and while he was in prison. After he converted, he started exploring religion in more personal terms. In the next section I discuss personal exploration as being an important aspect of faith for the participants while being part of a Muslim collective during their time in prison.

6.2. Prison Society

In this section I look at the social aspects of prison life and the significance of Muslims as a community in the prison context. I then look at neighbourhood affiliation and the crime committed as important factors that influence relationships and connections in prison. I conclude by looking at the importance of religion and race on relationships with prison staff.

6.2.1. Muslim 'community' in prison

The focus of this section is the commonalities and differences within the collective category of being Muslim in the prison context. I start by examining the importance of congregational prayer and prison imams as shared aspects of social life amongst Muslim offenders and discuss the ways in which these resources can be important for offenders by providing a

social connection inside prison. Along with this, I look at the ways in which participants describe their own identities in relation to the diverse and heterogeneous group of Muslims with which they are associated and with whom they share religious resources and provision inside prison. Having the space for differences in religious practise was important for participants in the confines of the prison environment.

A shared sense of routine which evolved around rituals and prayers was common to the participants during their time in prison. Chaplaincy (imam) and congregational prayers (Friday prayers) were familiar aspects of life outside prison that were points of connection in the unfamiliar prison environment. Ahmed, British Bangladeshi, served a four-year sentence for sex with a child. Like most of the research participants, he turned to religion during his time in prison. Ahmed went for Friday prayers regularly at the start of his sentence.

I went to Jummah prayer and obviously when your first time in prison it's scary, it's very scary. It was nice you know, when somebody greets you in a certain way and you see something familiar and you latch onto it. So that's what, how I started off.

The prison chaplaincy can play an important role in helping prisoners cope with traumatic events, institutional failings and personal emergencies⁵¹. Religious social roles also emphasise support of others. As part of the process of change, participants wanted to focus on contributing to their environment in a positive way. This meant helping others cope with the difficulties of life in prison and could be through offering emotional support as well as material support. In the hyper masculine prison environment, getting and giving such support was an important part of life in prison (Liebling, Arnold and Straub, 2011; Phillips, 2012b). Emotional support in a prison context can be hard to find. The bravado and 'fronting' which is an accepted part of the hegemonic masculinity of the prison environment restricts the sharing of difficult emotions and feelings of vulnerability with other prisoners (Phillips, 2012b). A few of the participants spoke of having a sense of responsibility to help other Muslims. This was usually for everyday things that were part of prison routine, such as providing support for new arrivals, or to share tobacco or other resources.

⁵¹ <http://www.publicspirit.org.uk/assets/Sophie-Gilliat-Ray-Muslim-Chaplaincy-8th-Nov.pdf>

Religious congregations can also be a place to find social connections when participants are trying to desist from crime (Clear *et al.*, 2000). In the accounts of self-improvement through prayer and religious observance (already discussed), the support of other prisoners was an important part of surviving prison. Both younger and older offenders spoke of the support of 'brothers' in faith with whom they spent time praying and learning about religion.

Yeah, in prison. I was praying five times a day. You know, even brothers here that were inside with me, they know. I was at the front, calling the Adhan (call to prayer) for the— in the masjid (mosque) for prayers, Friday prayers, you know. I was calling Adhan, I was learning Arabic, I was going to Islamic studies, reading Quran, encouraging other brothers to pray, teaching other brothers about Islam, teaching brothers Arabic that I know. I was embracing it, I found it easy to get through my sentence.

Along with these shared aspects of prison routine and the social support of a large Muslim congregation, intra-religious differences with other Muslim prisoners were also an important everyday aspect of life in contemporary prisons where the Muslim prison population has increased exponentially.

Participants encountered Muslims with differing ethnic, local and sectarian affiliations within the Muslim collective in the prison environment. This close proximity to Muslims who did not share the same locality, ethnicity and sect as them, was not an ordinary aspect of life outside prison, where religious attendance and connection was linked to small kinship communities with whom participants usually shared a common ethnicity, sect and local neighbourhood. Rather than a fixed sense of connection to a Muslim collective, these exchanges highlight a more negotiated sense of belonging to a Muslim collective identity which is influenced by a participant's own understanding of faith in relation to other Muslims. This negotiated sense of acceptance and belonging is very different to the increased importance attached to religion as the primary basis of developing social relationships in prison. Steve, mixed race, (Guyana and Montenegro) convert, described the importance of being confident in your opinions within the diverse Muslim community in prison.

Every Muslim, a lot of Muslims are different. Like people from Pakistan are different from people who are Arab or Sudanese. The way they think in general is just different. So it's interesting, really, but we've all got one common of belief, you

know? It's just like the way one person interprets it, interprets hadith or Sunnah (sayings of the Prophet Mohammad) or something like the Quran, it's different to how I might interpret that's all... I tell you, Islam is, I've noticed a lot of people, if you're not sure or confident within yourself, a lot of people try to impose the way, their interpretation of Islam on you, you know? So, you just have to read between the lines and just learn things for yourself. You know?

Differences in religious practise and identity were influenced by a number of factors such as, ethnicity, country of origin, sect and personal biography; these differences were not eroded through a shared religion. Although all participants were convinced that their version of Islam was the authentic one, they accepted and were usually tolerant of the 'tareekas' or beliefs of other sects. However along with tolerance and respect for diversity, there could also be 'streaks' of intolerance or anger at perceived denigration of personal religious practises and beliefs. This internal discussion and debate across sectarian, ethnic and religious lines in the prison community is not an aspect of religious life in prison which has received much attention.

In the sample, seven of the participants described themselves as Sufi Muslims. These participants were followers of a Sufi Sheikh in Cyprus, Sheikh Nazim. A majority of this group were from Azad Kashmir in Pakistan. The rest of the sample did not want to identify with a particular sect. They however emphasised more rational, literalist interpretations of spiritual texts. A detailed discussion of the theological differences between the different groups did not emerge through the interviews. However, these distinctions were expressed through differences in relational aspects of prison life.

Immad served several prison sentences during his young adult phase. His last time in prison (prior to the interview) was in 2011, when he spent several months in prison on remand. During his time in prison, Immad noticed changes in prisoner demographics: compared to his previous times in prison, there was a significant increase in the number of Muslim and Asian prisoners. Living in close proximity to Muslims from different sects was a new source of conflict for him.

Yeah we're Ahle Sunnah wal Jamaah, and yeah course, we follow the right way. A lot of people are on the wrong way but I know we're on the right way.

In some prisons, the imam was from the same sect as Immad (Ahle Sunnah Wal Jamat) so he was comfortable going to pray in congregation. In prisons where this was not the case, Immad tried to stay away from the congregation as he would get very angry if the imam contradicted his understanding of religion.

Imams don't help', they don't help one bit. They've gotta be Ahle Sunnah Wal Jamat if they're not, there's somet wrong with 'em. They spread, if they're saying little things like this, this can go cause wars, this. If someone say to you, "you can't wear these, that's *tawidh* (amulets as protection, these contain small parts of the Quran in Arabic) that's *bidah* (innovations in religion)", you're thinking, 'What? My mother and father have brought me up. You're tryna say my mother and father and my teachers are wrong?' That's what happens, isn't it? You get that, and I think you know what, they're wrong they don't teach you right.

Immad also described falling out with his cellmate who had Islamist views. Immad felt that his cellmate tried to bully and intimidate him. Within the prison environment expressing religious views with confidence was an important aspect of religious subjectivity. Holding on to your own beliefs and standing up to them in the face of contradictory interpretations was an aspect of life for Muslims in prison which came up in the interviews.

You get the stupid cunts that say 'takbeer Allah hu Akbar' you think 'you know what you muppet, what you doing?' Like one guy I was padded up with him, I remember this actually, he was a fanatic. You know Abu (Hamza?) that hook guy from Finsbury Park Mosque, that nugget, him. Anyway, when I was in that jail, I goes "boss, can you put me on a, on a normal wing with the Muslims because I'm gonna be fasting and I know if I'm with a gorah (white) in a pad somet's gonna happen, I'm gonna do somet stupid to him so get out the pad' they put me with a Scouser Muslim, when I seen him I thought 'you know what? I'm gonna have problems with this guy'... I thought 'fucking hell', so I'm acting all nice and simple thinking 'you know what my mum's stressed out' I'm fucked now, this drug's case'. I got him, like proper tryna bully me...

Immad's cellmate had threatened to attack him with a blade. As with other aspects of prison life, Immad had responded by standing up to him which got him to back down. Although Immad was critical of other Muslim sects in prison, he became close friends with Ilyas, who was a self-professed Islamist at the time. Ilyas was part of a group supporting violent Jihad in Pakistan through financial contributions. He continued to support this group throughout his sentence. Despite their differences in religious belief, they became close friends and kept in touch after release as well. Through Immad's influence, Ilyas moved away from supporting the extremist sect he affiliated with.

Abdullah was uneasy about discussing his association with Naqshbandi Islam with other Muslims inside prison. This was for a number of reasons. First, Abdullah didn't want his status as an offender to reflect poorly on his Sheikh. Second, he did not want to clash with other Muslims who disagreed with the practises common to Naqshbandi Islam that were considered more cultural than religious by some of the other Muslims. Third, he did not want to join in any of the discussions around religion in prison. He thus only revealed his religious practises to a few close friends.

There was a Shia kid, he sat down one day and he said something stupid. And another guy goes 'Astaghfirullah brother, you're a kufir (non-Muslim)', the other one turned around and goes 'how is he a kufir, brother? He's a muslamaan (Muslim), you can't call him a kafir'. You know, this that, debates, never got into it. Eventually when you're tryna stop a fight you say 'bundha ban, (be a man) I'll give you a slap, bandha ban (be a man), chill out man, what's up with ya?' That's all it was, that tension, nothin' else. That was actually caused by ourselves, us own Muslims, nobody else.

Interviewer: So not between non-Muslims and Muslims?

Abdullah: No, none of that. They don't know the difference between us. The only very, very clever ones would say Shia Muslims, Sunni, this, that, but that's it. I only met a handful of them 'cause, they were ex-army people, that was a different thing. They wasn't spoken to much...He's from Iran, he's from Iraq, he's from Afghanistan, he's from Kurdistan, you know stuff like that, that's it, nothing else.

Ammar (Black Caribbean convert) felt that his understanding of religion was disregarded by born-Muslims. For Ammar, religious authority was linked to understanding religious texts.

However, for South Asian Muslims, like Abdullah and Immad, religious authority was located in their family networks and their relationship with their Sheikh.

So you would have a guy, 60 years old, he's there for tax evasion, alright. Rocking backwards and forwards reciting from a book he has no understanding of, but he's been doing it for 50 maybe 60 years. Culturally particular practices, that he is engaged with has absolutely nothing, no basis in Quran and Sunnah at all. Now you highlight this off air maybe just you and him. 'Who are you to tell me? How can you tell me?'

Along with differences in literalist and cultural understanding of scriptural texts, participants described debate on the relationship between politics, religion and terrorism. Ahmed moved away from a group of Muslims in prison as he felt they were trying to push a politicised version of Islam on him.

I found certain individuals very poignant with their views and didn't like being questioned... views about having Sharia law in this country, views about what's happening in the Middle East, views about the prison system, views about how they feel they've been wronged, but they were militant in views, so although by actions they weren't militant, by the words they were and I didn't feel, I didn't feel that I fell in with that. I don't take, I don't take kindly when people do not answer questions but rebut it by 'I said so' or 'that's the way it is', I don't take kindly to that sort of response. If you don't know the answer that's fine by me, admit you don't know the answer but if you say 'yes but that's the way it is', I, I don't work well with that environment.

Relational aspects of faith include a break in prison routine due to congregational prayers; relationships which can be a source of emotional and material support. Along with this, however, there are many national ethnic and sectarian differences within Muslims in prison. I have highlighted some themes of difference which emerged in the interviews. For the majority of participants, a binary or polarised identity around the notion of Muslim and non-Muslim was not an aspect of religious identity in the prison context. The institutional pressures of being in prison meant everyone was in the 'same boat' (Imran). I next look at the influence of prison code and neighbourhood affiliations on social relations in prison.

6.22. Internal prison code and neighbourhood affiliations

Any discussion on identity in prison has to look at the indigenous and importation models of identity development. The indigenous model focuses on the prison as a ‘total institution’ in which the ‘pains of imprisonment’ are seen to have a transformational effect on the identity of individuals incarcerated (Sykes, 1958; Goffman, 1961). Loss of liberty, the lack of heterosexual relations, lack of autonomy and access to goods and services, as well as the stigma associated with a prison sentence are seen to lead to a unified sense of identity amongst prisoners (Sykes, 1958). While there are clear influences of these associated deprivations on the identity of prisoners, there are also aspects of identity in prison that are influenced by prisoners’ identity and life outside prison (Irwin and Cressey, 1962). The importation model of prison identity prioritises the importance of life before prison on the identity of prisoners while serving time. Recent research suggests that current day incarceration differs from the total institutions discussed in the pioneering studies of prison identity (Crewe, 2005). The ‘depth’ of prison experience is mitigated by regularly organised visitation, access to telephones on wings, and the availability of televisions in cells inside prison; all these allow for outside influences to remain important while in prison. Despite these changes, prisons remain in a place of deprivation of which the most acutely felt are loss of liberty, autonomy and important relationships. Thus identity in prison is forged by internal prison conditions and rules as well as by external conditions outside prison that continue to impact on experiences inside (Crewe, 2005, 2009).

As Imran described:

I mean the way everyone looks at it obviously we’re all in this like prison no matter what, we all gotta eat together, we all sleep together, in a way, in a way, even the white people, black people they all, I mean, they all, they all looked at, we all looked at we’re all in the same boat if you know what I mean. So really a lot of the time no one really, there was no trouble in there with us. I didn’t have no trouble anyway.

Like Imran, Naveed did not think racial or religious markers were important in influencing his identity. He wanted to use his sentence constructively to improve himself and focused on making friends with other prisoners who were not involved in crime inside prison.

I mean there were lots of Asians, but I didn't really want to associate with a lot of them. Because a lot of them went for drugs and they went with the bad boys and I didn't associate with them. I associated more with the good people, I always tried to be with the good people so I always you know would do that. And I didn't mind if you're black/white, the main thing for me was that if you're just good.

Social relations in prison are formed based on internal prison codes and external influence (Crewe, 2005). In this prisoner hierarchy in which armed robbers and organised criminals are top 'players', while sex offenders and heroin addicts are at the bottom, the crime committed and criminal affiliations from outside prison play an important role in determining social relations inside prison (Crewe, 2005b, 2009). When describing prison experiences, participants' crimes therefore were important in determining their relations with other prisoners and time inside prison.

Abdullah, British Pakistani, was arrested along with other members of his drug dealing gang. He was offered a reduced sentence if he helped the police identify the senior members of his group. Abdullah however refused to take the reduced sentence. He gained status inside prison because of his refusal to 'grass' on the other gang members. He initially saw his prison sentence as a part of his job. By not exposing the drug trafficking gang members who supplied him with drugs, Abdullah had guaranteed status for himself inside prison. The gang also promised to financially compensate him on the outside and after finishing his prison sentence, it was expected that he would go back and resume his work with them.

Obviously the name got around a lot – you know this guy's doing his prison sentence by keeping his mouth shut so people looked at it like that – you know this guy is a stand on guy, you know he's done time for a gorah (white) and he could have said easily it was him and he coulda walked away but this guy didn't. He went and said nothin' and did his time and just walked out.

Ammar and Ilyas were armed robbers and considered to be 'top players' in the prison hierarchy. Ali and Naveed were serving long sentences for violent offences. They were left alone as messing with a long-timer was considered risky. Ahmed's time in prison was dominated by concerns of violent attacks. As a sex offender, he was part of one of the most reviled groups inside prison. It was not safe for him to be part of the main prison population:

for his own protection, he had to stay in the vulnerable prisoner wing. Zulfikar struggled throughout his sentence. He was addicted to heroin and was diagnosed with mental health problems during his sentence. Crewe (2005b) suggests that heroin users are usually at the bottom of the prison hierarchy as they are seen as weak and needy. Zulfikar described his time in prison as isolated.

The significance of neighbourhood affiliations and the importance of connection to criminal networks outside played a definitive role in building social relationships inside prison. Participants quickly formed connections with friends they knew from their neighbourhood. This ability to make connections was an important part of surviving prison (Crewe, 2009; Phillips, 2012b). In this, the status outside prison in the neighbourhood played an important role in establishing autonomy and credibility inside prison (Clemmer, 1958; Irwin and Cressey, 1962). As Ilyas (British Pakistani) noted:

As soon as you go to prison, it is horrible first because you're not used to it. As soon as you, judge sentences you and you get sentenced then it obviously it hurts. But when you, soon as you go into prison, 'cause you know there's already so many people from your neck of the woods, they're already in there, friends of yours are doing two, three years. You already, you was probably, I was probably there 2-3 weeks before visiting someone in the prison, you know? So when you go in there you have people you know, so they already know you're getting, coming and so it's not really, it's not hard in prison especially if you know people and stuff. It can be for some people who are isolated, who are you know reserved, they don't speak, there's bullying and this all happens, you know? But otherwise it's prison... because that emotional feeling of how hard it is the first night, everything's been taken away, it dawns on you. But then as soon as the next day comes and you meet your friends again, and then slowly it becomes, you make it comfortable, you know? The next-door inmate, he's your neighbour now; he's not an inmate, he's your neighbour now, you know? So, you become, you adjust to the situation and you find, you make the most of it so to speak.

Immad, a British Pakistani participant, described the importance of neighbourhood relationships as follows:

The good jail is the people that are around you, and the bad jail is where you just don't know no one and they're just heroin users and scruffy cunts, you know? And you think, that's the difference. The jail, it's not the jail that, regardless of what the building looks like, even if it's gloomy or whatever, as long as you got two or three friends in there that you get on with, you won't even see that jail 'cause you'll be, everyday you'll be looking forward to going gym or whatever and before you know it, it's done. Yeah.

In prisons where Immad did not know anyone, he had to develop more complex strategies to survive inside. Standing up for yourself and exhibiting a capacity for violence in defending yourself were important ways of gaining respect and credibility in the prison hierarchy (Crewe, 2009; Phillips, 2012b). This aspect of prison life was also an importation from the road (Jewkes, 2005). Immad felt he had to fight in prison as his short height and ethnicity meant that he was seen as weak. This was especially true in prisons that were far from his city. Selling drugs was also a way of enhancing his status inside prison as it meant he had extra buying power and had a resource (drugs) which was highly desirable for part of the prison population (Crewe, 2005). Both these strategies for prison survival are similar to changes participants described in their neighbourhood where selling drugs was a way to have money in order to fit in with peers and the threat of violence was a way of gaining respect and legitimacy, as discussed in the previous chapter.

It was a bit of an experience because I used to end up in other jails like way out of the way where there'd be different accents and you wouldn't even understand 'em and you'd have, majority of them would be the goreh (white) and they didn't like Asians anyway so I'd be fighting in the jail, I'd be, I used to get into a lot of trouble when I was in jail, yeah. I used to get into more trouble, I used to think 'when's it gonna stop?' But if you wanna have a, a sad life in jail where you don't wanna come out your room and goreh (white) say whatever then you can do that. But then you have an option, either you're gonna stick up for yourself or whatever and I think that's what used to get me into trouble, when I stick up for meself 'cause I used to do do a few stupid things, and it's just one of them.

During his final time in prison on remand, Immad's main contacts inside prison were members of his extended family or kinship group who were also from his neighbourhood. His

cousin Imran (from this research) joined him in prison; he was convicted for trying to intimidate the victims to drop charges against Immad. Along with this, Immad had at least three other cousins in prison at the same time as him, and he came across them in different prisons while being moved around. Having so many people from his kinship network in prison with him, made prison easier for Immad. It also gave him the chance to play up in prison to an unprecedented degree. He spent his time in prison dealing drugs and other contraband items such as mobile phones. Immad's cousin Abdullah (in this research), was also serving a prison sentence for drug dealing and they were together in the same prison for a while. Imran (British Pakistani) served two sentences for violent assault. During both his prison sentences, he was looked after by family.

Both, I think, when I was, I think the first time I was in there it was, it was probably better when I was young, when I was twenty, it was, it was probably better for me in there, I mean it was really, I found, plus I had, 'cause we had a lot of, there was a lot of older lads, like there were a lot of older lads in there who knew obviously my uncles and all.

The importance of neighbourhood affiliations, status in prison due to the crime committed, mental health concerns, access to goods in prison, as well as personal interests were all important factors in influencing experiences, relationships and status inside prison. These factors remained significant regardless of religious affiliation and practise. This view was echoed by most of the participants who did not see their religion or race as a determining factor in the relationships they formed inside prison. Instead they focused on their shared neighbourhood affiliations with other prisoners and how their status in their working-class neighbourhood outside, translated into respect and belonging inside, with the hypermasculinity of the street code continuing to influence relations inside prison.

6.23. Race and religion in the prison society:

Chapter Two outlined previous research which has examined the significance of racial (Cheliotis and Liebling, 2005; Phillips and Earle, 2011) and religious affiliation (Liebling, Arnold and Straub, 2011; Earle and Phillips, 2013b) to experiences within prisons. It pointed

to several key events that have firmly placed monitoring and reducing racial and religious discrimination within criminal justice institutions on the policy agenda. Chapter Two also discussed the findings of the inspectorate report on experiences of Muslim prisoners, which highlighted the conflation of race and religion in creating experiences of alienation and discrimination inside prison (HMIP, 2010). The report outlined Muslim prisoners' concerns of being seen as a homogenous group through the lens of extremism and terrorism. This was a particular concern for non-Asian Muslim prisoners who felt they were not seen as authentic Muslims by prison staff and other prisoners. Following on from this, the Young report also drew attention to the negative effect of stereotyping on the experiences of black and Muslim prisoners (Young, 2008). The report highlighted the alienation and discontent felt by Muslim prisoners who felt they were negatively stereotyped as potential extremists.

The real danger presented by radicalisation in the prison setting has also been outlined. The politicisation of offenders based on religion was outlined in an ethnographic study on Stateville prison in the USA (Jacobs, 1977); recent research in maximum security prisons has raised concerns that similar trends towards balkanisation were present in prisons in the UK (Liebling, Arnold and Straub, 2011). Hamm's (2013) research on maximum security prisons in the USA suggests that radicalisation is likely to occur in badly managed prisons where there are low levels of trust between prison staff and prisoners. In particular, Hamm draws attention to 'self-starter' groups which are small cells of disgruntled citizens with no connection to international terrorist organisations that may become inspired by terrorist ideology. He sees prisons as environments in which such bonds and planning can take place (Hamm, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2013).

In this section, I outline the different ways in which participants described the significance of race, religion and ethnicity on perceptions of treatment by prison staff inside prison. In understanding these narratives, it is important to acknowledge that these are subjective and partial accounts from the participants' perspective. Their value lies in the deep engagement these provide of subjective feelings and lived experience of these participants, and the subsequent changes these brought about in their actions as well as perceptions. It also allows insight into their current self-identity.

I start by looking at the solidification of religious identity within a perceived hostile prison environment. In this I focus on the experiences of two prison converts, Ammar and Ali. Both

participants described increased scrutiny and suspicion due to their conversion. I also look at the experiences of Mohammad, a casual Muslim, who similarly described close ties amongst Muslims within one of the prisons where he spent time. These accounts draw attention to increased alienation (and possible radicalisation) within sections of the prison population. I discuss these in more detail to outline the perspectives of those participants who were a part of such solidarities within prison as these clearly have been a cause for concern. I then move on to discuss the experiences of some of the other participants who did not feel a sense of solidarity to other Muslims in prison. These were a majority of the sample who did not think that experiences of racism or discrimination required a collective 'Muslim' response. This section then moves on to look at descriptions of 'good' and 'bad' prisons in understanding the different relational and material factors that were important in making prison survivable.

Overt experiences of racist verbal and physical abuse by prison staff were rare, though not completely absent in the life story accounts. Participants saw such overt experiences of racism as a consequence of the personal racist disposition of some of the prison officers and took these in their stride. Such experiences were similar to life outside prison in which there are 'good and bad' people. Along with this however, there was a sense of a prevailing hidden and covert racism in the environment of some prisons. This covert racism had a more lasting impact on the few participants who experienced it. Accounts of a covertly racist prison environment focused on the influence of negative stereotyping on informal interactions between prison officers and prisoners. Informal racist language, the unfair use of discretion to limit access to privileges, work, and facilities, along with policing of religious practise were some of the ways in which participants described their experiences of racism (Phillips, 2012b; Liebling and Williams, 2017). Participants described collective resistance along with passive acceptance to deal with these 'pains of racism'.

Ammar's (Black Caribbean) experience of conversion and his later commitment to desist from crime have already been discussed. For Ammar, religion played an important role in helping him reorient his disposition away from crime towards engaging with his social surroundings in a positive way. It was at the point when Ammar viewed himself as changing to develop a 'pro-social' positive outlook that he started encountering distrust and suspicion from prison staff. Ammar had started a Cognitive Self Change Programme (CSCP) as part of his effort to desist from crime. He had opted for the course to reduce his level of risk, and ended up engaging very seriously with the programme. Ammar's problems with the prison

system started around the time he was doing his behavioural change course. One of the psychologists he was working with gave him a copy of his security file. In this file, Ammar had been identified as a potential Muslim extremist.

What was in there was just beyond anything I could've ever imagined. Mr Smith, suspected member of radical recruiters, you know intimidating people into Islam, intimidating people to take halal food on a hot plate. They would come to me and ask me, 'Could you do us a favour, could you come down on a hot plate, and make sure everything is being done in the way it should be, there's no cross contamination between utensils'. I said, 'Yeah of course'. 'Would you be the Muslim rep on the wing?' 'Yeah, of course'. All these kind of things they'd kinda give me responsibility for but then use it against me. So that is what got me into studying law, 'cause I just thought there is no body or panel to arbitrate, to legitimise, or even authenticate any of the statements that are being made there. So I needed to understand what is happening. And once I began to study, I began to reconnect what law was set out to do in terms of what parliament is set out for and I strangely began to develop a real healthy respect for it.

For Ammar, this label of being a Muslim extremist was another negative label in a series of negative labels that had been applied to him by the criminal justice system. He felt that through his interactions with the criminal justice system, he was trapped into a cycle of crime at a very young age. He felt that from a young age he had been stereotyped as an under-achieving, poorly socialised, Black repeat offender. Ammar felt that religion had helped him redefine this narrative to a narrative of redemption, where he managed to escape the endless cycle of crime and prison by reordering his life. This narrative took hold at the time of his last arrest.

For Ammar, his race combined with his religion was a problem for some of the prison staff, as he was attempting to disrupt and change a narrative that the prison staff were used to. By focusing on his religion and questioning his motives for conversion, he felt that a new label had been created for him: that of an extremist offender and radicalised recruiter. Ammar felt that once the label was developed, it followed him from prison to prison and he was treated with suspicion. Although he had moved away from crime, there was now a new reason to

monitor his behaviour: the concern that he might be an extremist (Liebling and Williams, 2017). The effect of this new label was the same: monitor and incarcerate.

All they wanna do is develop a file which can then be taken up with security services outside which can then hopefully result in that person coming back into the system.

Ammar's description of the shifting racism he encountered from prison officers is described by Earle and Phillips (2013a) in an article entitled 'Muslim is the new Black'. They suggest that concerns around Muslims and terrorism are similar to racist images in the 1960s that conflated race with criminality in the image of the inherently criminal 'Black mugger'. Phillips (2012b) suggests that latent expressions and impressions of racial difference and discrimination are still significant for prisoners in terms of self-identity and interaction with prison staff. Prisoners adapt and respond to these 'pains of racism' through fatalistic acceptance; collective resistance; and individual rebellion.

Ammar became involved in learning about the law and trying to figure out a way of dealing with what he felt was an unfair characterisation. He felt that by not conforming to the labels applied to him by prison staff – being either a career criminal or an extremist Muslim – he could strengthen his own identity as a prison reformer.

Yes that was inside prison, I kinda put a remit statement together and that was reform against HM prisons inmate mismanagement. And I wanted to do everything from representing immigration detainees, to child prisoners, you know, mothers in prisons, all of that kind of stuff.... However, I met some fantastic people and I began working in a social reform charity, when I got to open prison after serving about six and a half years, and they just really knocked down my remit statements, and said 'Look focus on the things that you're good at. You have an immense story, that story that you have. That journey that you've taken, where you're at now, managed to hold on to all your faculties through all of that is inspiring to me. So, in your own communities amongst people, it's something that you need to capitalise.' So, we— and so we reduced it and I came up with a law initiative, and I'm glad I did.

When he got to an open prison, Ammar started a social entrepreneurial course. He also worked with a youth charity involved in desistance work. However, the more successful

Ammar was in his achievements, the more antagonistic some of the prison officers were towards him. They kept trying to make a case against him by painting him as an extremist (Liebling and Williams, 2017). Seminal research by Genders and Player (1989) on race relations in five prisons outlined the negative stereotyping of black prisoners as having ‘a chip on their shoulder’, which was associated with discriminatory treatment in prison. For Ammar, racism was related to the ways in which he felt the prison administration placed obstacles in the path he was trying to create for himself to move away from crime. In place of overt racist name calling and abuse, racism can be experienced in the daily routine of interactions with prison staff and in their unwillingness to help certain ethnic minority prisoners. These daily humiliations and perceptions of disrespectful treatment are associated with psychological distress (Crewe, Liebling and Hulley, 2014).

In Ammar’s story, his journey towards release was a struggle against a system which was holding him back. When he reached open prison, the contrast became even starker for him. He had positive relationships based on trust and respect with the charity he was working in and the university he was studying at. However, when he returned to prison, the hostility, scrutiny and suspicion from prison staff increased.

We’d go through the reception area after having town visits, me going and spending time with my family for a few hours and coming back. Nobody would get searched except for me. I would get the most stringent search. To a point where other prisoners would be saying, ‘Why do you do this to this guy? It makes us look bad. I mean I feel like I’m an informer, I’m giving you information or something, you’re not, and it’s always, always this guy and he’s the best among us’. This is white guys, non-Muslim saying ‘He’s the best behaved amongst us, why do you do this to him and you do it all the time?’ and they just have that smirk, that kind of laugh about them.

Ammar contrasted the relationships in which he felt respected, heard and understood with the hostility and mistreatment he received at the hand of other staff members.

The people from the education department who were beautiful people, Rosie and all those women, they really— I loved them to bits, but you know what I mean? They worked under Emily (a staff member who did not like Ammar) and they didn't agree with anything. They said, ‘it’s clear, it’s clear, keep doing what you're doing, we love

you', this is the kind of spirit they had...Another good feeling that I had prior to leaving there was the governor of that establishment, all the governors had fought against me you know and there was one new governor who came there and his name was James Baker, James Baker, working class guy, my age, two years older than me and from Peckham, grew up in Peckham. On the estate, there you had lots of different types of friends, some of which had ended up in the same position that I was in at that point, and he was just one of those— you come across them now and again, a straight governor, you tell him listen this is what's happening you know, he'll take your word for it...

Ammar's relationship with his probation officer was also based on trust. His probation officer had helped him deal with the hostility he encountered inside prison. Ammar felt that religion helped him in maintaining his commitment to desist from crime, despite his growing anger and frustration at the treatment he was receiving.

Like Ammar, Ali (Irish Catholic) also converted to Islam in prison. Similar to Ammar, his conversion to Islam drew a lot of suspicion and scrutiny from prison staff. Ali described his initial religious identity as that of a 'Super Salafi'. Such dogmatic adherence to religion is usually an aspect of worship for less experienced practitioners, particularly converts (Nieuwkerk, 2014). This overt expression of Islam got Ali into trouble with the prison officers as well as with born-Muslims who resented his interference in their practise of religion.

When I first become a Muslim, I would— I was like 'I know you're a Salafi,' and I was like 'Yooo,' you know you get the fire of iman (faith) you know you're all hot up and you're like, 'Ahh this is the truth. I wanna go out and spread it out instead of being in the prison'. You know it's when you start to grow up, you start to mature and you realise Islam is not about antagonising, it's not about forcing it upon people and you know and all that kind of thing. You start to relax but I think everyone who first becomes Muslim has that, I think it's different for born Muslims but I definitely feel for reverts, there's always that intensity, that initial rush of iman (faith) — and that's why guidance is important and that's why seeking the correct knowledge is important and holding onto the correct understanding and knowing where to take your knowledge from is important. I was blessed, I had good people around me who

understood the religion and were able to reign in my excesses erm and stop me from having erm certain types of ideology and more and more against certain things, so you know I was very, very blessed.

Ali found it hard to have his conversion ‘taken seriously’ in prison. His gang background and the obvious changes in his style of dressing and identity raised a lot of suspicion in prison. His conversion was perceived as a form of rebellion. Ali however rejected the idea that he was drawn to Islam as an ‘outsider’ religion.

Erm yeah you know but I definitely feel erm you don’t realise until you’ve put the hat on if you like, you know what I mean? If you ain’t got the hat on and you’re still a white South London guy you don’t really see it until you stick the hat on and you change who you are and you realise ‘ohh this is what these people are going through,’ do you know what I mean? And you start thinking ‘oh they’re talking about me now! You know they’re talking about— they’re not just talking about, excuse my language, that Paki— excuse my language. They’re talking about me as a Muslim,’

Ali’s sentence coincided with the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. He felt that this broader context also contributed to the extra suspicion he encountered in prison as there was a lot of concern around identifying and dealing with radicalisation and extremism. Like other participants, Ali talked about a veiled or covert form of racism, which was hard to detect but led to a lot of antagonism between Muslim prisoners and prison staff.

Ali’s experience wasn’t uniformly difficult in all prisons. He drew a distinction between private prisons and state prisons. An analysis of private and public prisons outlined the different staff cultures that were prevalent in both types of prisons; this study found that prisoners had a preference for the stability offered by older, skilled, authoritative staff in public prisons (Crewe, Liebling and Hulley, 2014). Ali drew similar distinctions in explaining his preference for ‘ex-military’ prison officers in public sector prisons.

(Name of prison) erm they were totally unprepared, they had no clue about Islam and they really thought that they were MI5 and it was their job to protect the nation and you know they were calling us all sorts of names. Erm they threatened us to not pray together they you know, they stopped us from doing Jumah (Friday prayers). They

stopped us from doing Eid Salah (Eid prayer) you know, they were just and they would make up an excuse for it, you'd know why they done it but they'd make up an excuse, 'security', 'oh I'm sorry but...' it becomes you know, you can't put your finger on it, you wanna be 'Islamophobe' but you can't, they're very clever and erm they become very antagonistic.

Ali described two reasons behind Muslim prisoner solidarity in prison. One was to protest against the increased suspicion and clamp-down on some Muslim religious practises in prison which were regarded as extremist by prison staff. The other reason for grouping together was to counter racist attacks in prison (Phillips, 2012b). He felt that Muslim prisoners only worked together in these two situations. For Ali, it was the common experience of being stereotyped and ostracised which made Muslims stick together in some prisons. He described a strong sense of solidarity emerging amongst Muslim prisoners within such a context.

I think a lot of it is... when you first become Muslim, Islam promotes the idea of a Ummah, you know the Ummah. And if one part of the body hurts or is in pain then the rest of the body feels it. So, I think there's an element of that that is in there. That once you become a part of this, this religion that you feel a certain protectiveness over other people of your faith. I think for me at that time in prison, I think, there was also that element of- people felt that you were necessarily an extremist, so you would then spend a lot of time with Muslims only because you were ostracised by other members of the prison community. So, you did feel that.

Riots and disorder in prison occur in situations where there is a breakdown in staff and prisoner relationships, which may lead prisoners to start to question the legitimacy of the prison regime (Crewe, Liebling and Hulley, 2014). The use of unfair discretion by prison officers in dealing with daily aspects of prison routine such as access to privileges, responding to requests and providing information, can play an important role in influencing perceptions of staff amongst prisoners (Crewe, Liebling and Hulley, 2014). In the prison where Ali was, the relationship between prison staff and Muslim prisoners was particularly tense.

These problems came to a head on Eid when the Muslim prisoners were not allowed out of their rooms for the congregational Eid prayer early in the morning. This caused a lot of

discontent amongst the prisoners and they refused to go back to their rooms after they had said their Eid prayer. Although Ali described collective resistance to perceived mistreatment, this was fragmented and short lived. He was regarded as one of the main instigators behind this event and was put in solitary confinement. He spent some of his time in solitary on hunger strike.

Conditions. It was the way we were being treated, we just had enough you know, and we wanted the governor to come and give a reason why this was happening. They called me an instigator, I suppose I was on some levels erm but I can't control a room full of 30 men 40, 50 men. At that time. I just turned around and said, 'you know enough's enough, I want to speak to the governor,' and (name of prison) — so we always felt like everything was sanctioned from above you know. It wasn't just sanctioned from below, it wasn't just a naughty screw or a naughty you know, it was sanctioned from above because every time we tried to take it to above there would be nothing. You'd hear nothing and that really did lead to a lot of discontent, a lot of unhappiness, a lot of, 'It's from the top down man, you know, what we gonna do. It's the top down, it's the top down.' So, we just refused to bang up a few hours. It all kind of heated up, you know a lot of people walked out you know it kind of broke. They targeted six of us we got nicked taken down the block, I got put on investigation erm.

Despite a degree of collective solidarity to counter the perceived racism of prison officers and prisoners, there were limits Ali was not willing to cross in helping other Muslim prisoners. In the prison where he described solidarity amongst Muslims to counter racism, he felt that it attracted other prisoners who wanted to use this protection for other purposes as well.

In fact, in (name of prison) myself and about four of the long termers had to put a hold down, we were very clear, if you have a problem with a non-Muslim over a coffer, if you're selling drugs I mean, do not come to us. 'Cause we are not going to incur your sin and just because your name is Ahmed you think you can go out and do what you like and you have the back up of all Muslims, doesn't work like that. But if a non-Muslim takes advantage of you then we will defend you. And that was the kind of rule that we had in prison, and I think it's a good rule. I think it's a smart rule, 'cause we did find we were getting involved in things we shouldn't be getting

involved in you know drug deals that have gone wrong, borrowing, you know borrowing things from each other. If you wanna do that that's your problem.

Ali gave up his parole so that he could be moved out of this prison. He was moved to a state prison and quickly settled down. He became more involved with the diversity team inside prison and saw this as a positive way of dealing with some of the problems inside. Ali was coming close to the end of his sentence, so he became less interested in the dynamics inside prison and started planning for his release.

They shipped me to the (name of prison) and I really got on well in the (name of prison) erm I never had any problems in the (name of prison) in fact and I think that's cause there was good Imaams there and they were very proactive Imaams there and we had two Imaams from Egypt and one of them's actually really quite well erm but he taught me a lot and he really went to back for us in a positive way erm and I think I was growing a bit older anyway, and I just you know, I married my wife and I married her in prison erm I met her through a brother of mine who I met in prison. He knew me in my prison sentence erm she asked him to be her wali (guardian) and he introduced us, we got married and I think your kind of focal point changes then. Erm it's not so much about prison anymore 'cause when you got something outside you're less inclined to worry about what's going on in prison you know.

Despite the difficulties Ali encountered in prison, like some of the born Muslims (discussed earlier) he saw his time in prison as part of a divine plan. It 'saved' him and gave him the tools to live his life in a better way. It was also the place where he found God.

[Prison] could be a positive and it could be a negative but I definitely feel that now it's a positive 'cause it was the time for me to readjust and assess erm you know, it stops me from getting angry, it allows me to you know, the tools that I picked up in prison to deal with stuff it still helps you know I think they can still help, and I don't think you can look at any situation and you know say 'prison was all bad,' no prison saved me because I think if Allah had to, and you know it came from faith obviously you have to be, Allah will put you in a correct situation at the correct time even though you can't see it you know, and even you may feel it's bad for you but you know it's actually a good erm and I truly believe God put me in prison and saved me

from being a statistic if you like, you know I've had friends that are dead you know, you know a couple of my friends got murdered you know, got couple of more friends overdosed on heroin you know I've lost people along the way and I don't see why I would have been any different, do you know what I mean? I wasn't exactly superman so you know reality is that one day things catch up to you and you know you can't go around thinking you can do the same things constantly and not pay the consequences, and Alhamdulillah my consequence was prison you know.

The importance of the prison environment in affecting the practise of religion and solidarity amongst Muslims is illustrated in the life story of Mohammad. Mohammad can be described as a casual Muslim (Phillips, 2012b); throughout his life outside prison he did not regard religion as important in his life. In prison, he was encouraged to turn to religion by his brother who visited him regularly. For Mohammad, however, religion remained peripheral.

I would try on and off, there were phases where I'd be at the Jummah, Friday prayers or I would be at halaqahs (religious gatherings) with my brother and try and put effort, phases but nothing consistent. And then when I went into prison, after about, but straight away I started praying five times a day but then it started going to four, three, two and then none.

Mohammad spent his sentence divided between London prisons and a prison located further south. For him, there was a difference in London prisons and his time away from London.

London was different or, 'cause I went to five jails I think, or four jails... I went, last it was in (name). The London jails are different but in general their staff were okay, you know... like the other one which was in (name), it was like a white area and all the governors you know were majority white, the staff majority white, cause (South of London) that area, and so that's where it was different. Like in, in London jails you would have like a Pakistani officer but, or a few of them, Muslims officer, Asian officers, it would be a lot more but in that (name of prison), most of them are, most of the time I was in (name of prison), that was, I dunno it felt, it just felt like majority of the inmates were white as well, not majority of inmates but it felt like the, the, like racism, yeah racist or Islamophobia, yeah. It just felt like that. I mean in certain, in

certain instances that I noticed, picked up on things like that and to say an example, I don't think, don't know if I can think of an example.

Like Ali, Mohammad described solidarity amongst Muslims in this prison and felt that it was linked to conditions in prison.

I think that's part of the reason why the brotherhood was so strong as well you know and close knit amongst the Muslims because of the fact that they knew we're far away from home. Our families, some people ain't even got families in this country, far away from home, in a bad place, in a rundown jail you know, the jail was so run down you know and that's part of the reason why you know we came together so much and like we worked so close knit.

In the 'run down' prison far from home, Mohammad found comfort in religion and was closely involved with other Muslims. In the prison near his home in London he became casual in his practise of religion and relied on friends from his neighbourhood.

No, I was actually enjoying (name of prison) yeah. It was close to London for visits firstly, secondly the food was great, thirdly my cellmate you know had it you know and he had it you know he had, he was in with all the London people you know...

The examples described above suggest that in some prisons Islam can become a signifier around which group solidarities can form. The research data suggests that the focus of these collectives is local to the prison; as a change of prison led to changes in attitude with religion becoming less important as an aspect of collective identity. Mohammad was sent to a prison in the South of England twice during his sentence. Each time he was in this prison he felt a sense of solidarity with other Muslims in this prison. In the other five prisons which were near his home, religion was not the basis on which he formed relationships inside prison. He relied more on neighbourhood contacts and remained a casual Muslim in these prisons.

Ali and Ammar both attached importance to religious practise inside prison. Their use of religion as a personal blue print for change was outlined in a previous section. Their narrative accounts of their developing recognition of discrimination within the prison system emphasised their experiences of increased suspicion and scrutiny which were linked to

difficulty in interactions with prison staff within daily prison routine. Mark Hamm's (2007) work on prison radicalisation suggests that the prison environment plays an important role in politicising prisoners. This is indicated by the stories presented above where, within a single life story, the significance of religion in forming alliances inside prison shifted based on the prison environment.

Experiences of negative treatment were not always linked to group solidarity. Zulfikar, another casual Muslim, also had a very difficult time during his last prison sentence. His interactions with prison officers throughout his time in prison were tense. He felt that prison officers used a series of labels to denigrate him. However, unlike the respondents discussed above, his response was 'duck down and get through it'. For a majority of participants, passive acceptance was the main reaction to episodes of negative treatment.

They (prison officers) just didn't like me you know, they started making up all sorts of rumours about me and it, it was really rubbish, and so I just moved from jail to jail, and then finally I got released... ah they were saying all sorts of things, they were calling me a paedophile, a rapist, a grass, a poofar, they were saying so many different things about me you know, that people didn't like, terrorists, you know I started growing my beard more and they sort of calling me terrorist. It was very bad, but I struggled through it and I managed to get through it and yeah that was it basically. I ended getting into problems with prisoners as well and yeah it was very bad.

Like Mohammad (mentioned earlier) respondents preferred to be in prisons near their home. Abdullah, British Pakistani, from the North of England, felt the prison officers understood him more in these prisons.

So, you do realise it 'cause when you're out of your comfort zone, you've moved away from that. They make you feel it. Now them, guards are not there now to help you, whereas if I was in my own area they'd be like 'Oi, you he's alright, leave him...

Abdullah denied the significance of race in influencing relationships by arguing, 'there are good and bad people'. For Abdullah, his relationship with prison staff was influenced by his connection to a white drug dealing gang and local association through belonging to the same

area. His descriptions did not fit with essentialised ideas of religion or race. In prison, Abdullah enjoyed a privileged position in the prison hierarchy due to his connection to his white drug dealing gang.

You know when I said to you I was in prison and I was with some big gangsters? I don't want to mention the names, but the people who I was locked up with, they were English people. They were gangsters. There's a massive hall, up and down, people live in. There used to be a table right near the office and the prison staff, like you are sat, would be sat at the back. This table here was like the top boys. I was the only Paki, they used to say, I was the only Apna (a term used to describe someone who is Pakistani, means 'our' in Urdu) Pakistani who used to sit on that table with them guys. I didn't understand it first, why they sit there. They used to play cards, and I noticed nobody ever used to sit there except for these certain individuals about five, six, seven people used to sit there but a permanent five people sat there. And then my mate goes to me 'You don't worry you, you'll always get looked after, you're with me. They'll always look at you different'.

Through his connection to the gang, Abdullah was moved to a single room after only two months in prison. This made 'the prison rock', as there were Asian prisoners who had been there longer and were not given enhanced status. Abdullah distinguished between 'goreh (white)' and 'Apna' (a term suggesting belonging) used to refer to other British Pakistanis. The dividing of people into 'goreh' and 'apnas' was not done on race alone; Abdullah himself was regarded as a 'gorah'(white) because of the privileges he got in prison.

Everybody knew, 'you know why he's there (in a single cell), 'cause he sits on that table, he's with them goreh, (whites) he's a fucking gorah (white) himself... this that, he's a gorah (white), you know, Paki'.

He also described one of the British Pakistani prison officers as a goree (white woman) because of her attitude towards Asian prisoners: she was harder on them.

One was a Pathaani (an ethnic group in Pakistan) woman, a girl, she actually thought she was goree (white). Miss Arif, she was called. Oh, my God did she think she was white! She made white people look Asian. Honest to God. That's how bad it was.

Abdullah also outlined what he regarded as the racism of some Asians. He was critical of Asians who saw every setback they encountered as a sign of racism.

But the Asians, don't forget you had Asians from other communities and other areas, and they were racists anyway. Our Asians. Do you get what I mean? So it was like they're walking and they're saying something, they used to call them, the guards, 'Boss, can I have this?' 'No.' 'Why? Is it 'cause I'm Pakistani? I'm a Paki, is that what it is?' And they were like 'Cause no, you can't have it, 'cause, we've not got it'. So, you know it was one a them. So, with me it was like 'Can I have this?' 'No, sorry, can't have it.' 'Why?' 'Cause you can't have it' 'No problem', move on. Didn't make a hoo-hah about it. So, they looked at me, this guy's alright, you know. Couple of days go by, what I asked for I get it. Do you understand what I mean?

Along with this however, he stated that 'the whole system is racist' and 'no matter what you do you'll always be a Paki'. Abdullah felt this sense of racism through his own position of privilege: as he was considered a part of the white gang, prison officers and gang members felt they could pass racist comments in his company.

They used to say 'You know that Paki there...' and I used to look and I used to think which one? 'That one there'. 'Yeah, what about him?' They were like 'Nothing personal but fucking hate him'. And I used to think you know you hurt me. 'See that white bastard there?' And I used to try it and they never liked it, but they couldn't say no, could they? But you know what, the officers used to sit there, 'I fucking hate him'

These contradictory ideas outline the shifting ways in which identity and belonging emerged for Abdullah. It shows that conceptions of belonging and otherness are not fixed in racial or religious categories, rather they emerge through interactions. Participants reflected on their prison experience to outline both positive and negative interactions with prison staff that remained memorable for them after their release from prison. Imran explained it as follows:

Like a decent one (prison officer) he'd come in, and 'cause obviously you get officers that'd come and they come in your pad and have a chat with ya, they'd sit down and say 'How you doin'?' They're proper, do you know what I mean? Like you can tell

they were genuine. And then like certain officers you'd go and ask 'em for something and they say 'Oh, fuck off, what, what do you want?' Do you know what I mean? 'No, leave me alone', 'Yeah, I'll sort it out, don't worry', and then they just fob you off, little things, even like little things like you come, you come to your door a bit late and, if you know that, that, like the officer's on he's a racist, you think he's a racist, and like they say 'bang up time eight o'clock, whatever, nine o'clock' and then you go and you come two minutes late, they put a letter through your door, here warning. Do you know what I mean? So, you knew, I mean you knew, little little things and then, 'cause that's the way they're gonna like really get ya, 'cause obviously if you get a few warnings, they put you in like, they can put you in basic for like three weeks.

Respondents focused on respect and trust as qualities that marked positive interactions with prison staff. Support and acknowledgement of positive changes in participants' behaviour by prison staff was also something that Naveed felt was important in staff and prisoner interaction.

The (name of prison) was good because officers were compassionate and I think people that should get into trouble, they should get into trouble, but I think they should be fair, they should see people for who they are rather than just a colour or the look, they should be meritocratic and then also you know, I think they should be like humane, the way they treat you, and I think that's the main thing is, just be fair. That's the priority and I think also people that want to do good in their lives, they should support that, so they should facilitate that as much as they can.

Prisons are regarded as a microcosm of society; these insights into environments that participants found nurturing and supportive, along with experiences of feeling ostracised and excluded, have broader implications which allow for an understanding of the material and relational needs that are important for individuals to flourish within society. This is a theme that continued to emerge throughout the life stories where, at each stage of their lives, participants described difficulties in accessing basic needs for connection and sustenance and ways in which they searched to fulfil these needs throughout their lives in different, sometimes toxic environments.

Conclusion

Religious adherence in prison involved a focus on prayer and religious ritual as a way of dealing with emotional distress, stigma, mundanity of prison routine as well as the ontological insecurity and lack of autonomy in prison. Prison was an environment in which participants described changes to self in which developing moral virtue became an overriding concern, this was true for both born-Muslims and converts. In this religious teaching of dealing with experiences of loss and suffering by seeing these as opportunities to build moral virtue were important in leading some of the participants to focus on imprisonment as an opportunity for personal moral development. Participants focused on developing aspirational ideals of the social roles they occupied on the outside. They also described seeing religion as a 'blue print' to bring about positive change. By focusing on spiritual growth and values, participants developed more holistic ideals of personal achievement. The communal and relational aspects of faith in prison were then explored, followed by a discussion of the importance of ethnic diversity within Muslims in prison; this heterogeneity is an important aspect of Islam both inside and outside prison.

I moved on to outline the importance of neighbourhood contacts and the crime committed as equally important in influencing relationships and self-identity in the prison context. The chapter concluded by looking at religious solidarities around perceptions of covert Islamophobia in some prisons. Close bonding between Muslim prisoners as well as a concern with tackling discrimination within the prison context became aspects of prisoners' orientation within these prisons. However, offenders still rejected the comparison of this solidarity to prison gangs. The close ties were explained as important in combatting discrimination by prison staff and other prisoners and participants rejected ideas that these ties were used to challenge authority or to facilitate crime. Nevertheless, these accounts suggest strong in group solidarity amongst small groups of offenders which is targeted at bringing about a change in the way they are dealt with by the prison service.

The relationship between religious adherence and propensity to commit crimes is complex. This complexity is reflected in the prison environment. The life stories presented here have outlined the different ways in which religious adherence influenced attitudes, values, beliefs, relationships and behaviour of the research participants. In the next chapter, I look at whether changes to self-identity that occur in prison are sustained upon release from prison.

7: Life After Prison

In the previous chapter I focused on changes to religious identity brought about through incarceration. I outlined the different ways in which religious understandings of suffering and pain underpinned prisoners' adaptations in the prison environment. I showed how religious rituals, beliefs and moral codes played an important role in giving structure and meaning to time in prison. Following on from this, in this chapter I look at whether changes to religious identity that occur in prison are sustained upon release. I use the participant's descriptions of their adherence to moral codes, their sense of connection to a religious community and their attachment to positive roles within the family and community as important indicators of generative change which is linked to desistance from crime.

Re-integration and resettlement are two central concerns with regard to offenders' after-prison experiences; however, these terms are misleading as they are based on assumptions that the prisoner had a level of integration and was settled before entering prison. The pre-prison life experiences of respondents suggested a different picture: their lives were largely tumultuous and chaotic with severe social as well as economic deficits. After conviction, these deficits only increased through the added layer of stigma, shame, social learning from the prison environment, and social exclusion due to the new status as a convicted criminal. The low levels of social and economic capital that offenders have before prison shrink further once they have been convicted. It is therefore not surprising that almost 44%⁵² of all offenders will return to prison within two years, this figure is higher (59%) for those serving short sentences (less than twelve months). This resonates with the research data where nine of the participants had served more than one prison sentence. However, the age-crime curve also shows that a majority of offenders will eventually desist from crime completely. This makes the period after release from prison particularly important from a crime control perspective, as there is potential for desistance as well as continued or increased offending after release.

Maruna (2001) describes desistance as a process of keeping away from criminal activities despite facing obstacles and challenges in everyday life. Abdullah, Ammar, Ali, Yousef,

⁵²<http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Bromley%20Briefings/Summer%202017%20factfile.pdf>.

Rahim, Imran and Naveed (the youngest in this group was Imran, who was thirty) had desisted from crime. These participants had well developed 'redemption narratives' in which they described their new identity as embedded within a religious community (Maruna, 2001).

The rest of the participants had a more passive attitude to their offending behaviours. They continued to use techniques of neutralisation to explain their involvement in crime. For the second group religious moral codes were aspirational ideals they wanted to adopt in the future. Although these participants regarded these rules as important they continued to see themselves as weak in dealing with everyday challenges. Although these participants also had access to new relationships and practical help and support, from family and community, this was not enough to help them desist from crime. Outside the prison environment, maintaining religious practise became hard for these younger participants. They quickly became involved with previous associates and continued to use techniques of neutralisation to explain their involvement in crime.

Social relationships in the family played an important role in the desistance process. Participants' aspirations for the future also revolved around social roles within the family. Social relationships in the family were important motivators in developing an identity away from crime.

7.1. Role of the religious community in helping with desistance

Desistance is a process which requires understanding how individuals who have committed crimes in the past, change and continue to maintain crime-free behaviour (Maruna, 2001). Maruna (2001) suggests that ex-offenders frame their criminal past and their commitment to a future free of crime through the use of a redemption script. The redemption script has three main elements: it emphasises a 'core' positive identity; reinforces a strong sense of personal control over future actions; and focuses on generativity- the desire to contribute positively to future generations (Maruna, 2001). For Muslim ex-offenders their belonging in a religious community was an important aspect of their redemption scripts. Involvement in a religious community reinforced their sense of having a core positive identity. Religious communities helped participants overcome self-doubts about their decision to desist. Within these communities, interactions with spiritual leaders acted as redemption rituals and strengthened

a positive identity. Religious communities were also a source of social capital and participants could access help with housing and employment through their social contacts within the community. Contributing positively to their community helped these participants strengthen their new identity away from crime. The role of a 'wounded healer' was particularly important in this regard (LeBel, Richie and Maruna, 2015).

7.11. Redemption narratives, new social relations and a moral community

Weaver and McNeill (2014) focus on the important role played by family, religious community, work and friendship groups in facilitating changes in identity and a desistance from crime. They suggest that interdependent relationships based on mutual reciprocity are important in fostering change that lead to desistance from crime (Weaver and McNeill, 2015). Participants emphasised the importance of their religious communities in inhibiting their involvement in crime by providing strong social bonds and support. Religious communities were seen as an alternative to previously harmful peer relationships. Positive roles within a community offered an alternative way to make social bonds and gain the respect and status that individuals got through their involvement with their peer groups (Maruna, 2007). Religious communities were seen to promote moral messages that condemned acts of deviance and crime and helped offenders maintain a sense of connection to moral norms and values. Congregational religious practise also provided structure and gave a sense of routine to everyday life (Calverley, 2013).

It is important to emphasise that the importance of a religious community in deterring from crime was effective for participants who had developed strong redemption narratives in which they separated their current identity from their past criminal actions and saw themselves as inhabiting their real, authentic 'good' self (Maruna, 2001). Desistance involved both an active decision and commitment from the individual in moving away from crime despite difficulties and challenges, along with an environment which promoted and supported this change in the individual.

Within this research, religious communities were seen as playing an important role in helping ex-offenders desist from crime. Going to the mosque was a social activity which formed an important part of everyday life for ex-offenders. These participants attached importance to

their religious community and regular attendance at the mosque either daily, a few times a week, or at least every Friday, as a part of their weekly routine.

A regular routine that involved weekly Dhikr gatherings and prayers at the mosque was central to how Abdullah (British Pakistani) organised his week. For Abdullah, changing his circle of friends and involving himself back in the mosque was crucial to his commitment to desist.

When I came out (of prison) I had offers every other week. 'Hey how you doing? Heard your back, sorry to hear about your father, you know when you're ready give us a shout'. I just changed my number then. I just said boom crossed everybody out start fresh again start fresh again, started coming Dhikr (reading verses of the quran in group) here. On Thursday we'd come here and read Dhikr, read Jummah (Friday prayer), changed my attitude, changed my ways, changed everythin cause now I've seen it there's no point doin it again is there? You know what I mean. You know so I'm just thinking let's start all over again get another chance and get on with it to be honest with you. But it's just obviously you know you make mistakes we're human innit but if you make the same mistakes again I don't know what to call that – stupid innit.

Abdullah had also been planning a trip to visit the home and resting place of his Sheikh in Cyprus, where he would meet the Sheikh's successor. He felt that a visit to his Sheikh's grave would represent a fresh start for him.

'Yeah, there's a dargah (shrine) there and there's a lot of you know graves you know darbars (another word for shrine) to go to, you know stuff to see. It's just, how can I say, it's like for me it's a need to go thing 'cause for me it's like a refresh, I'm refreshing myself, I'm cleaning myself, I'm moving forward to be honest with you, so I'm moving on, I'm tryna move on. That's it; that's all it is; it's just to get it out of my system. Before it was like, 'Are you with Sheikh Saab, are you Sheikh Saab's murid (follower)? I'd be like 'No'. Why? 'Cause I was ashamed of, they were like, 'Eh Sheikh deh murid eh (he's a follower of the Sheikh), look at the state of him.'

Having a person of high spiritual standing engage with them, despite their own stigmatised identity (due to their crimes), helped participants to manage the shame and stigma of their

crime. By getting acceptance from a figure of religious authority, participants felt they could move away from the stigma of their past. This acceptance can be regarded as a 'redemption ritual.' As Abdullah explained:

Our Sheikh's different, it's no sukhti (strictness), there is no sukhti... I am, I am, I am scum, I am scum. People know now my true colours and what I am. You know who I am. People know who I am, you know more than that, but you still choose to sit here and talk to me. That's what my Sheikh's like. My Sheikh will say to me 'Son, yeah, it happens innit. Have you learnt anything off it?' 'Yeah I have.' 'Right, poothur (son) go and do your thing. Go and do your thing. Now don't make the mistake again.' If you make it again the Sheikh will sit there and say, 'You done it again?' 'I have done it again.' 'What you doing?' It's just, you know what it is, it's just that focus...

Involvement in a religious community was also important for Rahim (British Pakistani), the only respondent who did not serve a prison sentence, he had served a community order for fraud. Rahim had a strong sense of guilt about his involvement in the crime and a feeling of shame whenever it was brought up. Wanting to maintain his position within the community, was a strong motivator in keeping Rahim away from crime.

But it's, it's more than just a criminal thing, don't forget it's, the reason why it still affects me, it's not cause it was 200 hours I got lucky, I'm thankful for what I got. The sad thing is, is how, only you're the one that's a black sheep or the, even till now sometimes if the conversation's brought up, it is sometimes once in a year, once in six months, not brought up but as a little jibe... and it's sad really, because in Asian, Pakistani, Asian culture if you live in one community obviously you have to be, you have to be trustworthy, no you don't have to be trustworthy, you, what's the word I'm looking for? You do need self-respect and you also need, you know you want others to respect you as well 'cause you're always stuck in one place as well you know, that's how you're identified. And obviously you can't, either you want people to forget about it but, if it's not forgot about, at least people play it down for you a little. Yeah so sometimes it does upset ya, so if that's not done, it's like what's the word I'm looking for? What's that word they use? Closure. There's no, for me sometimes there's no closure.

Ammar and Ali relied on the Muslim friends from prison to keep them focused on religion after their release. Ammar was responsible for calling a group of friends every morning to remind them to pray their early morning prayer. Ali's sentence was for attempted murder, his criminal record was permanent, and he had to make employers aware of his criminal past. This was something that Ali recognised as a long-term disadvantage for him. For Ali, the pull of making money 'off the street' was always there, as was the temptation of returning to his gang. He had to work hard to stay away from his gang and his previous lifestyle.

But when I first got out it became very, very relevant to me you know it's the possibility of going back to the gang erm was always there because I'd always have them as a fall back you know, they were my safety net and I had to get to a point psychologically to say to myself 'No they're not a safety net, they're a negative in my life,' and you know it's all very easy doing that in a very conscious way, but understanding that subconsciously I think it's a whole different level erm but yeah I think over the last few years I've started to become more settled, more balanced...

Ali had relied on his Muslim friends from prison when he was going through a 'mid-life crisis'.

Last year I had a major slip. You know I'm just saying this for the sake of being truthful. I had a major slip, me and my wife broke, I went back to London. I thought I was missing something, I thought all those years in prison, coming out, going to Egypt. Not seeing the great... not seeing the Muslim Ummah in any great kind of situation, struggling to find work, every type of door... I thought I was getting every door slammed in my face. And I had enough, and I said I wanna go out... So, I went out to bars and started wanting to live that non-Muslim lifestyle again... You see everybody is out there having fun and I allowed myself to become weak and... but you know it was difficult.

So, I went back to London and being away from the situation and back around people who knew me...umm and who challenged me, you know what I mean. I needed to be around people who would just be bluntly honest with me and say listen... yeah, they were all from prison. I reached out to them. I texted about three or four of them one day and said, 'Look man, I'm in a bad way, you know I'm really in a bad way, I'm

close to doing things that I'm not, you know'... and Maashallah they really... they said come back to London, at my house every day you know, they were good brothers, I mean. Yeah, they were really there for me. You know they kinda got me back... I went back to Regents masjid (mosque), which is a really fantastic masjid. And the imam there is so down to earth he just knows, he just knows. And I was just sitting there talking to him and he was like, 'Oh yeah, everyone is going to have a slip at some time in their life.' You know what I mean. But at some point, if you believe in God, at some point you're going to say 'No, I can't excuse that', and you gotta pull yourself back. It took me about nine months altogether. It was difficult, it was difficult but it's part of life, you know. But I do think that, I sincerely think that it was my mid-life crisis and I did fail to see it. Being in prison for so long I hadn't slipped when I got out, I think it was storing itself up.

Ali started attending a mosque close to his home in Milton Keynes. Regular attendance at the mosque had provided him with a social network closer to his home where he could meet people who had similar religious views to him.

I go mosque regularly, as regularly as possible. I will start more now that I can't work, very strange Milton Keynes erm but there's a new mosque at a place called (name) and that's really nice. There's a lot of reverts, positive erm... We don't have any problems with the Muslim community there. There's a lot of Somalis erm but I'm very close with the, I think more than any Muslim culture I really like the Somalis and I think it's because of they're a lot of truthfulness. A lot of truthfulness you know they're very truthful erm sometimes it's uncomfortable but they're very truthful erm and the difference between the Asian and the Somali community when it comes to reverts is that the Somalis' face light up when they see a revert, absolutely love reverts erm they just accept you, you know they see you on the, and the same with the Kenya's erm you know I have a lot of Kenyan people around me erm people from Tanzania and some from (unclear) you know I find the Africans they don't have that (unclear) erm that some sections, I'm not gonna label a whole community but some sections of the Asian communities have erm where it comes to reverts, they get quite paranoid yeah they kind of think like 'I'm gonna get a mad Salafi coming in now' do you know what I mean?

This sense that he fit in at some mosques more than others was also felt by Yousef, another Irish Catholic convert to Islam. Choosing mosques and shifting from one mosque to another highlights the existence of multiple small religious communities' present in one city or even neighbourhood. A sense of belonging to a religious community, is linked to close connections formed through personal interactions, this aspect of religious belonging was emphasised more by participants rather than a sense of a broader belonging to an imagined transnational Muslim community.

God forgive me I walk past mosques to get here but it's (mosque) no nonsense, just no nonsense. You can speak free and not constantly, constantly have to choose your words. It's like when you're learning, I find it really difficult learning... and I just can't, it's different here. I'm allowed to be myself, I don't mean to be cheeky or anything, I mean I'm allowed to be myself, I'm allowed to try and explain things the way I explain it rather than people constantly giving me grief...

Yousef was from a very staunch Irish Catholic family; he had served several sentences for his involvement with the IRA (Irish Republican Army). He converted to Islam at the age of forty; conversion was important in helping Yousef move away from the ethnic religious conflicts within Belfast and his involvement in crimes. Establishing himself in a community away from Belfast, the place where he became involved in crime, was an important part of resettlement for Yousef. Conversion offered Yousef a new community in which he was immersed in religious practise; he made new relationships within his community and was able to create a new identity for himself which was separate from his time in Belfast. Religious rituals also helped him deal with his 'sadness'.

Your grief, you're having grief or something wrong with you, I'd open it up, talks, it just tells me at times 'calm down, go to sleep, leave it with me' and stuff it's just amazing. But the Al Qaf and Yasin, (names of chapters in the Quran) was listening to that for months and months before I took the shahadah and that was the only thing that I could do till it put me to sleep, I don't mean in a boring way, I mean in a peaceful way. It was like as if I had heard it before, but I hadn't, when I was a kid, but it was just, this is for me, this. This is what I wanna do with my life. Soon as my father give me my freedom, straight in. Come over took the shahada (pledge).

Similar to Yousef, Ilyas had also been affiliated with an extremist group since his teenage years. After his release from prison, Ilyas had moved away from his extremist group and had become a member of a different mosque. By joining a new community, he could disassociate from his previous friends. He had moved away from Coventry, where he grew up and where he had been involved in crime, to London to give himself a new start. Through this mosque he was introduced to his wife. His marriage was another factor which had helped him in settling down.

Along with providing participants a new set of social relations that they could rely on for emotional and moral support, participants could also access help to gain employment or housing through these new relationships.

7.12. Tangible Help with employment and housing

Most of the participants described relying on contacts made through their religious communities in finding help with employment and housing. Trust formed through social relationships within religious communities allowed participants to move beyond the stigma of a criminal record. Several participants had got help in setting up business ventures through social contacts at their mosque. This help in setting up business ventures was invaluable for ex-offenders. Their criminal record limited their options for getting regular work; setting up their own business gave them the opportunity to earn money without having to deal with the stress and stigma of sharing their criminal record with potential employers.

Abdullah described the stress he felt, thinking about looking for work after his sentence.

How can you resettle someone back into a system what's not gonna accept you to take a job on? You can't do taxis, you can't do public sector jobs, you have to tell them your CRB clearance so if anybody doing a CRB clearance they know you're a criminal, so who's gonna give a job to a criminal? Think about that for one minute. How can you say that this person is fit enough to go out into, you know back into the community? When all the community jobs are gonna do a CRB check even from a delivery driver to working in a pizza hut or a Domino's pizza, wanna do a CRB check on you and find out you're a criminal. That's not gonna settle well, is it?

Fictive kinship networks linked to his mosque played an important role in helping Abdullah become self-employed.

I always knew people anyway, because my uncle, my chachu (uncle), few members of my family, they were in the ladies' wear. So, I always had the connections since we were kids that I know who to go to. So if I went to him he don't need a credit or someone to say he's a good lad, him. They'll give me the credit anyway 'cause of family links. They knew my father, there's always be that link, they'll never run off with our money, so he's one of them.

Imran, who served two prison sentences for violence, also found support to set up a business through friends in his kinship network. After leaving prison he set up a call centre with the help of a few friends from his community.

I mean obviously for me because like, obviously I was always into fighting and all that I think that's what I think me now, I've like calmed down all that I think basically just stick to the law, simple as that, obviously we're blessed enough to get to a position where we have done now you know what I mean? Obviously I'm not an (unclear), we were as teenagers, we were lost, proper lost. We done everything and so for us to like leave that and Alhamdulillah, we're alright because now we've obviously got legit businesses there where it's happening for us if you know what I mean?

Along with the tangible help Imran got through friends in his community, he also attributed the success of his call centre to his Sheikh who he felt had blessed his business. Near his call centre some of the workers had set up a Thursday Dhikr group, which they attended after work.

It's like we built up from like seven, eight people from eight people, then from there we built up within two years we got it to like 150-60 people so obviously, once we implement the idea of it and we got the computers it just sprung up itself, it just— constantly just— like it's just the building I mean I can't explain it. I mean obviously

we got blessings I think of Sheikh Itisham but it's just since these last six, seven months it's just been building.

Similarly, Naveed also got his first job through the help of Muslim friends outside prison. Close to the end of his sixteen-year sentence for murder, when Naveed was in an open prison, he was introduced to a property developer through one of his friends. This developer offered him a job on one of his projects. Having a job to come out to made, the transition to life outside prison much easier for him. This friend became a key contact for Naveed outside prison; he started to mentor him and helped him progress through different types of jobs. Eventually he got him involved in a mentoring project for young Muslim offenders. Rahim was also able to move away from involvement in crime as he got help in setting up his own business. In his business venture, a friend from his mosque had helped him by giving him free access to his delivery vans.

Although religious communities could offer help with housing and employment, this help could also be jeopardised due to continued involvement in crime. Vin and Zulfikar, two casual Muslims, had found accommodation through community contacts; both of them became homeless due to their continued involvement in crime. After release from prison, Zulfikar's cousin had offered him a place to stay in London but this arrangement did not last long as his cousin did not like his drugs taking and alcohol use.

After his release from prison, Vin had secured accommodation through an Islamic charity. He really valued his apartment as his first secure, independent accommodation and felt having access to his own place could represent the first step towards taking more responsibility and becoming an adult. He had many plans for the future.

Where I've got my own little flat, it's like it's the first time I've been in a situation in life, so I'm managing it. It's like I'm becoming an adult. Or I am an adult, but I know what I'm being, I'm being more responsible in terms of getting to understand how the working world works. I've never had a job before. But same way I've never gone out and doing my own shoppin', my own washin', my own laundry, my own cookin'. All of these things, I'm doing them. So I have grown. I'm adding these skills and experiences. Just trying to re-start my life, basically, away from the crime. Cuz the

circle was vicious circle, and one thing leads to the next, and you know, you only get older.

Despite the hope and aspiration in Vin's interview, his situation changed quite rapidly. When I tried to contact him for a follow-up interview, he was not available. I found out through the organisation that he had been evicted from his flat. A key worker at the organisation explained that he was always behind on his rent; there were concerns that he had a gambling addiction and was using his housing benefit to maintain his addiction. Although Vin was open about his dependence on cannabis in the interview, he did not mention anything about gambling. However, since he could not consistently keep to the rules set by the organisation, he had lost his access to his apartment.

7.13. Giving back to society- moving away from materialism

Civic engagement and giving back to the community offered participants another avenue through which they could occupy roles that could lead to identity change and help them move away from crime (Uggen, Manza, & Behrens, 2013). Many of the participants spoke of wanting to contribute in a more positive way to broader society. For some this was related to their role in their fictive kinship community (Dawood, Abdullah, Rahim), while for others it was a broader concern. In particular, participants saw their life stories as instructional; they felt their experiences were useful in helping others avoid the mistakes they had made. Two of the participants were working as mentors in the criminal justice system. Others also spoke about their desire to be more civically involved.

Amongst ex-offenders the role of a 'wounded healer', a person who helps other prisoners navigate their integration back into society, is seen to lead to a range of positive outcomes (LeBel, Richie and Maruna, 2015). Involvement in mentoring roles is linked to a lower sense of stigma about previous criminal history, more pro-social values, better self-esteem and better coping strategies, along with higher levels of wellbeing and life satisfaction (LeBel, Richie and Maruna, 2015). Ammar and Naveed started their mentoring training during their time in open prison.

In talking about his journey into crime, Ammar appreciated the importance of the personal factors that contributed to his offending, such as his mother's struggles as a single parent, and his own desire for a glamorous exciting lifestyle and material acquisitions. His behavioural change course in prison had helped him understand the role of these factors in his continued offending. Along with this, Ammar had extensively read criminological theory and literature on the civil rights movement; through this he also attached importance to the role of disproportionality and institutional racism in his journey towards crime. He had developed a programme to help young offenders desist from crime which explored the personal and structural reasons behind offending. Ammar's own story and experiences were central to his work and he hoped to inspire other offenders by sharing his experiences. In his desistance journey, Ammar saw religion as playing a vital role in keeping him committed to a crime-free life. The belief in transcendental rewards in the after-life helped him remain committed to positive engagement and behaviour despite the challenges and setbacks he experienced.

You know Islam, what it has done for me it has given me, it's like a manual, it's given me a fantastic user manual, my Quran is like a user manual which kind of helps— assists in areas socially which you know, I find hugely useful and beneficial and I enjoy it, and also, as well things that you do, work that you put in, sometimes you can become disheartened and this is why people tend to revert back to (unclear). I'm fighting the good fight, no one's taking any notice, why am I bothering, then you go back, but when you have Islam you know that whatever you do, whatever you send forward you know it's going to be there as a source of rahma (blessing) for you in the time of qiyamah (after death), so you're not worried about it, so you do it because you know it's the right thing to do so that is a huge enabler, for you to continue upon what you are upon. It's a huge enabler.

Ammar had also developed a programme of information for parents whose children come in repeat contact with the criminal justice system. Another area Ammar wanted to work in was the media. He was developing free content but hoped that this material would become popular online and could lead to a television contract in the future. A law degree had given Ammar an appreciation of the law and parliament; he was however, still sceptical of aspects of the criminal justice system that he regarded as geared towards locking people into a life of crime. Work as a mentor was an important influence on Ammar's identity and had helped him maintain and further develop his own identity as an ex-offender.

The nature of Ammar's work meant that he continued to be involved with the criminal justice system. His relationship with some parts of the prison service remained the same: they were resistant to allow Ammar access to any formal mentoring role inside prison. He was continuing to stay involved with offender mentoring through contracts and work he got through third sector organisations.

I struggled, I struggled for this reason. If you have a system that's intrinsically set up for a person to fail, so a guy comes out into the community, you have everything in place, you wanna catch this person once they fall, just manage him until he falls, and then you throw him back into the system. Most of the time he goes back into that prison system, he's gonna be in areas of the prison largely unsupervised, in someone's cell where you can't see him, in a classroom, and this is sort of the worst of the community, the ones you're really really concerned about. So what do you mean you don't want someone who's had that as an experience in the past, turned that whole situation around, could come back within prison to inspire people to change their behaviours. By giving that positive realm, laying their score out saying 'Look, man, I used to do it.' And that person would never leave the sight of a prison officer because he would be escorted into the prison, into any area, he would probably never be three or four feet away from an officer. What do you mean you're not happy with that? I can't understand that as a process, do you know what I mean? It doesn't make any sense, does it? So, I mean I struggled with it massively.

Towards the end of the research, Ammar had started a full-time job related to criminal justice. I did not get details of his new role. It would have been interesting to see the changes to his identity brought about through this role, as it could represent a 'redemption ritual'. His identity within his peer group had already shifted. Prior to his decision to desist, he was a 'top player' in his neighbourhood; now he was seen as someone 'who turned it all around'.

Well yeah, you know what's happened more recently now is that everybody is very much aware of my journey of change. And it is now become, I've become kind of a sensationalised story in that environment, and there are people who I haven't seen in years, they are telling me my achievements, they say, 'Yeah I just came out my man telling me what you've been getting up with'. They, they know because they said Ammar turned it all around, he's working for the government now, you know. And

you know, they put their own gloss on it, you know. But it's having an impact. Even me not contacting them but they hearing. 'Cause everyone just wants out. When they're sitting down staring at the cracks in the ceiling on their beds, and the issues are there, they think about everyone. You have time to do that, you think of everyone, you think about those relationships all the people. When we hear that somebody has made it out, 'cause you're looking for a route out. Because you're shut, all the doors are shut which comes back to, to re-entry, the reintegration guarantee stuff from Norway that nobody is doing that here. And I mean, it's clear, once you're in, that's it you're stuffed. It's almost like a civil death as I said before. It gets worse and worse. But the situation we find with people who are aware that somebody has changed they are inspired by that. So yeah, there are many people that I have come in contact with... umm.. although they might not have the ability at the moment to be able to make that, cause it's hard work, it's hard work.

Following release, Naveed had tried working as a site manger on a building project and as an event organiser. Although he was earning well in his work, he was dissatisfied with both jobs and went back to working as a voluntary mentor. Even though he was not getting paid for this work, he found it more satisfying than his other jobs. After working as a voluntary mentor for a while, Naveed found a paid role working with Muslim young offenders. He considered his role as a mentor to be a very positive part of his life.

Steve also wanted to work as a youth mentor. He felt such work would be particularly rewarding for him. Although he had only been out of prison for a few months at the time of the interview, he had many plans for his future. Expanding on from employment, he had spent time outlining the different social roles he hoped to fulfil. In this he attached importance to employment, family roles and giving back to the community by helping others.

What I really want to do is get into that mentoring like youths that are in gangs and trying to deter them from, because obviously I've been there, I've done that. Been involved in gangs in that area and stuff like that. So that's what I want to do, and in terms of, that would be fulfilling for me. Just before I come out, I was thinking about even like charity work abroad. Not for long. Just for me, helping someone, I get, there's nothing, there's not a better feeling, you know what I'm saying? There's not a better feeling. Obviously, I have to make money, but I started to realise it before, I

was always 'money, money, money'. But there's more to life than money, you know? Money can't bring you happiness. So, I'd rather help someone along the way, and be satisfied and content, you know? So, like I said yeah, so hopefully, hopefully, something to do within the mentoring sector, helping youths, and have a family, settle down. See my family around me is all comfortable, settled, my mum--love my mum, implicitly man... Dad, dad's fine. Sister, just make sure I'm meeting my nephews, niece, don't want for nothing. Just be a good, just be, hopefully trying to be a good husband or I would just be a good family man. Yeah. I'm decent already as it is, but obviously just want to get a little bit more stable within myself, my you know, my everyday life and be able to provide a little bit more. You know?

While in prison, Ali had described himself as quite active in trying to change aspects of the prison system, particularly the ways in which Muslim offenders were dealt with in prison. He described involvement in a sit-in protest as well as working as part of the diversity team to work towards resolving issues he felt were important for Muslim offenders. After release from prison, he still felt that social activism and tackling social injustice were important aspects of his identity as a Muslim. However, he was reluctant to get involved as he felt that even if he participated in a peaceful protest there was the danger that he could be rearrested.

Imran had set up a call centre with some friends. He felt that his business offered him a chance to give back to the community as he was able to give employment to young boys in his city.

Plus, we're okay, so I mean that one thing (his business) like changed completely from what we are, well from what we were. Do you know what I mean? Obviously in a positive way, so we're bringing something to the community. Or we're doing something and now, for example the place in (name of city) we took like 30, 40 lads from the area who had nothing basically, who were drug dealers who were everything and we took 30, 40 of them and put them straight and now they're all paying taxes, they're all getting their own wages, mothers are happy, fathers are happy that's, do you know what I mean? So, we're lucky to be where we are and we can do that. So, Alhamdulillah I mean everything's worked out for us so we're alright.

Ex-offenders attached importance to their informal role within their community as important in their desistance journey. The chance to contribute positively to their community, to be involved in activities within their religious community, and to be seen as established members of their communities were an important way of giving back to society, which was important for respondents.

Community membership could offer participants the chance to build non-criminal relationships, as well as get help with employment and housing. However, desistance from crime was a process which required constant work from participants, and many found it hard to completely move away from crime. Dependence on drugs was a mitigating factor, however, which could draw participants back towards crime, as were financial pressures and the pull of negative peer relationships. In the next section I discuss the experiences of participants who remained involved in crime.

7.2. Role of religion for persistent offenders

In chapter five I have outlined the forms of spiritual sense making that are used as techniques of neutralisation to avoid stigma and maintain a positive self-identity despite involvement in rule breaking. This form of sense making remained important for some of the participants after prison as well. Most of the participants who saw themselves as religious, and who were involved in a religious community, emphasised that they were ex-offenders and had moved away from involvement in crime. However, being part of a religious community was not always linked to desistance. The strain of economic pressures, dependence on drugs, mental health issues, negative peer relationships and difficulty in managing emotional responses to difficult social situations were some of the drivers that remained important influences that led to involvement in crime.

The main difference between persistent offenders and ex-offenders was a sense of control over personal actions. Persistent offenders who were part of religious communities felt that their actions were driven by forces outside their control (Topalli, Brezina and Bernhardt, 2013). They described their rule breaking as driven by worldly temptations or strains. This focus on external forces helped them neutralise their involvement in crime. These participants retained the idea of returning to a pure Muslim identity in the future.

‘Brickman’s compensatory model’ provides a useful starting point to understand the importance of the narratives presented in this section (outlined in Maruna and Copes, 2005). This model suggests that ‘individuals who don’t blame themselves for their problems but hold themselves responsible for the solutions for their problems’ have a better adaptive model. By not blaming themselves for their involvement in crime, individuals are able to avoid internalising the stigma of their past actions. This makes it easier for them to develop a new identity which allows them to move away from crime in the future. Identity change is seen as a process which starts with contemplation of the possibility of change (Ebaugh, 1988). Within this group, contemplation along with phases of action were visible, however a complete shift in social relationships and changes to identity was not observable.

Dawood, mixed race, convert, was a regular attendee at his mosque and had recently been arrested for involvement in the supply of drugs and possession of an imitation firearm. Dawood had converted to Islam after his release from prison. He had a dream which he interpreted to mean that he should use religion to re-order his life. He also understood his dream to mean that he should try to influence other people to follow Islam and live a more positive life. After his conversion, Dawood had been a regular attendee at his mosque. He had been trying to get younger members of his mosque to become more committed to following religious rules. He had also been travelling regularly to see his Sheikh in Cyprus. Despite his involvement in his community, Dawood had become drawn into crime again. For Dawood, his arrest was a one-off slip; he had succumbed to the financial pressures, and he had also wanted to help his friend who was looking for a place to store some of his drugs. Describing his crime as influenced by external pressures and explaining his actions as an attempt to help a friend were ways in which he could see his crime as externally driven and in line with his religious beliefs. Dawood was guilty and embarrassed about letting down his Sheikh who had been encouraging him to reorder his life. However, he was sure that his Sheikh would forgive him, and would ask him to focus on this experience as a learning opportunity for the future.

Like his mum kicks him out. She’s found some ganja or something in the house some puri (packet of drugs) erm and she kicked him out the house. So he says ‘Can I stay at the flat?’ and I’m like might as well and ‘cause I was staying somewhere else at the time I was like, ‘Yeah no problem, no problem.’ Like I say he was giving me money as well, which I was a bit skint at the time because I was like going back down d’you know the wrong ways and that, so my money weren’t save, it was windowed away.

Like I say I had the stress of Christmas coming up and the kids saying ‘I want this, I want that, I want this, I want that’ so like I said I don’t know why but I kinda justified it to myself in my own head ‘Oh well I’m not doing it myself like I’m just letting him do it in the flat and letting him stay there’ and like I said I can’t tell lies and say I didn’t know he was doing drugs ‘cause I did know he was doing drugs and selling drugs erm like I said I kinda justified it to myself.

After release, Immad had continued his prayers and recitation of the Quran at home. In all his interviews, he had emphasised how he was trying to stay away from violent altercations. However, this was also a part of his behaviour he had difficulty controlling. This was a theme to which he returned again and again. When I went back for the second interview, Immad was unavailable; he had been involved in a fight and was in hospital with head injuries. Immad described his involvement in crime as being caused through the provocation of others, who ‘deserved to be taught a lesson.’ This blaming the victim is a common technique of neutralisation.

I’m one of them people, me at any time something can happen and I can just make my decision. And even try and refrain from it, I just think ‘that’s wrong, that’s wrong’ but how much can you tolerate? Some people can tolerate a lot but with me I can tolerate to a level and then when I think about the person, and I think ‘right he’s an idiot him’, then I think his mum and dad are decent people, leave him. That’s what I think ‘leave him’, but you know when he’s getting whatever and I look at him and I think ‘his mum and dad, his dad’s that guy’, I’m gonna teach him a lesson, just to teach him and then I end up in jail. That’s what happens. But no more now. That’s it. No more messing about. Well I’m trying not to anyway.

Throughout Immad’s life, spirituality, violence and drugs had gone hand in hand. For him handling illicit goods was similar to ‘buying and selling’.

I’ve always been involved with crime. It’s normal to me to me– I don’t know but yeah it is normal to me. Like getting something cheaper and selling it on for more and regardless of what it is, what object it is or what is it, it’s just what you’re used to doing ain’t ya? So yeah but I think it’s always been, nobody’s perfect, everyone always does a bit of a buying and selling or whatever, whatever yeah.

Many of the participants became casual in their practise of religion after release from prison. This was especially true for participants who found religion useful in dealing with the pains associated with imprisonment. After release, these participants did not need to use religion to distract them from their day to day life and found it hard to remain consistent in practise. While religious practise was easy in prison where there were no distractions, maintaining it outside prison was quite difficult. Ahmed, Mohammad, Vin, Steve, Waqar, Hameed and Zulfikar regarded themselves as casual Muslims who were not consistent in religious practise. Although these participants were struggling to maintain strict adherence to religious rules, they saw these rules as important. For this group of participants, religious practise and adherence to religious rules was an aspiration for the future. Within this group, focus on external drives and temptations into crime also remained a part of the narrative.

For Vin, mixed race, religious teachings provided a way of understanding the world and himself. He felt that following the 'path' offered by religion would help him to improve his choices and he could move away from crime.

If I correlate my life, if I make a correlation to my life and my religion, my religion is a way of me of understanding my life, and understanding life in general, not just mine--how things go in the world. And I just needed that, that's what was right for me, that's what would make things right for me. And it would have if I'd stayed on that path in terms of doing what is obligated of me. And that will always be the case, from now and forever until I die. It's just about making the right decisions. We've got free will. I don't want to go back to prison. I don't want to, I don't want to make nothing of myself because the potential is so much, so long ago. Now I'm just at a point in life where it's so easy to give up. I could give up. Because it's been hard for me. It has been hard. And it's still hard. But that's not an option, because I've got the ambition and the desire to make something of myself because I came from, I've been through too much for it all to be for nothing. So, I'll just, even the death of my friend and everything. I just hope it's not all in vain.

However, this sense that religion provided a blue print for action did not mean that Vin had completely altered his lifestyle. He was open about continuing to smoke cannabis. He felt that 'everyone does something' (a technique of neutralisation is to see rule-breaking as common).

He felt that his actions were separate to his beliefs, so even though he was involved in actions which contradicted his beliefs, he felt he could hang onto his beliefs and could become a better Muslim and take up his 'true' identity in the future.

My beliefs are my beliefs. What I do, I suppose--what I do does not affect my belief, put it like that. But my beliefs may affect what I do. And even though you know, I'm not, I didn't consider myself yeah a good Muslim or you know, end of the day, people sin and nobody's perfect. Everybody sins. I sin, you sin. But it's not something that I'm going to disregard just because of the wrong that I'm doing. This is why it's important for us to pray, to repent. To make tawba (repentance). If I was to live life how all Muslims should live life, I wouldn't be in trouble. I wouldn't be getting into all these things. But it's easier said than done. But you know, I still pray, every Friday I'll go to Jumah (Friday prayer). I don't pray five times a day, stuff like that, but I try, I do make an effort. I try. I wish it would be easier, and I hope it will be easier for me in the future, and when I get working, getting a job inshallah. But for now, I'm just trying.

The hope that strict adherence to religious rules could be used to change choices and the direction of their life, while acknowledging that at present they were not fully following these rules, was repeated in many of the stories. For these participants, religion offered an aspirational code that they felt they would like to follow in the future. Mohammad was inconsistent in religious practise inside prison. After release, his practise of religion still varied. Developing a personal blue print and having the strength to commit to it was an aspiration for Mohammad.

A lot of the time in prison, people would say to me 'Yeah now is okay but when you come out of prison then that will be the test for you,' and it was the test for me because I came away, I fell off my Deen (religion) you know my Deen suffered when I left prison. First it was for a couple of months two, three months it was strong and all going good praying five times a day, but then slowly slipped back into you know erm bad habits and basically not bad habits but I stopped praying and you know not the right company maybe-- definitely not the right company and then kind of fell off it and then it's been very here and there up until about three, four months ago, or two,

three months ago maybe or however three, four months ago. Now I feel like it's coming to a point where I want to embrace it wholly and be headstrong and not make a mockery with Allah you know, and not turn back on my heels you know. Just I've got this feeling you know and I've got this aim and goal to— or you know I'm serious. I don't want to go back again or go here and there, up and down you know with Iman... 'Cause I've had enough as well, I've had enough of you know the bad things you know happening and you know doing bad. Bad things happened to me, I had enough and you know I just want to do right and not look back basically.

Waqar had started to pray more inside prison. After release from prison, his practise had decreased.

Yeah, I was (religious). I was much more than now.

After release Waqar felt that he was not practising as much anymore. I asked him how he would be different if he was practising.

I'd probably pray every day, not smoking, not chilling, not going out, stuff like that.

Waqar saw religion as an important part of who he was. He felt he 'strayed' from religion from time to time but religion was still 'in' him.

Like, I don't know. Just, it's just me, that's who I am. I feel like that's my identity, that's who I am. But I might not act upon what my religion preaches, but I've still got that in me. If someone were to ask me, I'd just be like, I will still pray and stuff like that.

The hope of turning to religion in the future to turn away from crime was an aspiration held by many of the participants who became casual in religious practise after release from prison. Within this group, some of the participants continued to be involved in crime. They saw their involvement in crime as attributable to external forces rather than their own actions. Common techniques of neutralisation, which were described in chapter five, remained important in helping them explain their continued involvement in crime.

While most of the participants held on to the hope of becoming more consistent in religious practise and moving away from crime, Zulfikar was more pessimistic about changing his life and identity. A deeply internalised negative self-identity is most closely related to secondary deviance (Topalli, Brezina and Bernhardt, 2013).

My parents are quite religious. My mum passed away now but my step mum is quite religious as well, 'cause my dad got married again and yeah they're quite religious. They're always encouraging me to you know pray but I haven't even got a prayer mat at home, you know so it's like I'm very lazy, I'm a very lazy person, I find I'm quite lethargic, kind of lazy. I've got illness but it's not because of that, I think it's just a normal, a natural thing for me to be lazy and yeah.

After release from prison, Zulfikar's cousin had offered him a place to stay in London. Despite having help from his extended family, he had struggled to stay away from crime. His arrangement of living with family did not last long, as Zulfikar was drinking quite heavily and taking drugs. His cousin did not like his drug-taking and alcohol use and asked him to leave. Zulfikar became homeless and started living on the street. He had been recalled back to prison twice: once for a breach of probation conditions and the second time for car theft. At the time of the interview, he was serving a community order for assault. Zulfikar related his involvement in crime to his 'kismet' (fate).

It (religious practise) goes up and down, sometimes I'm in and sometimes I go out, sometimes I go in, sometimes I go out. I know it's not good, you're not supposed to do that but it's just my kismet really and yeah it's like, at the moment I'm not praying or anything but when Ramadan comes, it's gonna be very soon now, I'm probably gonna start fasting and start praying inshaallah, hopefully but until then I'm just, I'm just doing nothing.

In the last two sections I focused on the personal narratives of offenders who have desisted from crime and those who had not. Although most of the participants had become more religious in prison, maintaining religious practise and staying away from crime varied once they had been released from prison. This raised important questions about the circumstances that led participants to bring about lasting changes in their identity, social networks, goals and

aspirations. Consistently in the life stories a majority of participants focused on close family relationships as being important in prompting a change in their behaviour. The death of close relatives, birth of a child, finding a close mentor or role model in the family were some of the reasons participants gave for re-evaluating their lives and wanting to change. In the next section I discuss the ways in which family relationships were seen as central to prompting positive identity change and desistance.

7.3. Social relationships as ‘hooks’ for change

The stabilising effects of adult social roles within the family and through employment are seen to cause changes to identity which are linked to desistance from crime (Sampson and Laub, 2001; Laub, 2003). Such social roles can become ‘hooks’ through which changes to identity and behaviour can occur. This was apparent in the life-story accounts, where actual change and the desire to bring about change was linked to maintaining and improving close family relationships. As part of spiritual development, participants prioritised the importance of living up to idealised social roles such as that of a son, husband or father.

The role of a responsible parent in particular was linked to a desire to move away from crime (Maruna, 2007; Visher, Bakken and Gunter, 2013). Childhood experiences of abuse, poverty, difficult school experiences and negative parenting styles were crucial in the participants’ own journey into crime. As parents, they reflected on their own childhood experiences and drew on the model presented by their parents, modifying aspects they considered harmful.

For Ali, his marriage while he was in prison was an important turning point after which he decided to move away from crime. After release from prison, he started living with his wife and step daughter. His role as a step-father became very important for him post-release. As Ali married his wife while in prison, they both had to adjust to living together since his release. Things got tumultuous at times, but they had worked their way through these ups and downs. Ali also had a son from a previous relationship. He tried to get in touch with his son after release but was told that his son did not want to meet him. Ali found it quite upsetting to talk about his son. He had to accept the fact that he did not have a role in his son’s life at present and hoped that one day his son may come looking for him and he would be able to establish a relationship with him. He had created a Facebook page with his original name and new contact details in case his son ever tried to look for information about him online.

Ali reconnected with his mother from inside prison. A few months after his release, his mother had to have surgery. Ali moved in with her and took care of her household bills and her post-operative care. Having a close relationship with his mother was an important change for Ali as during his time involved in crime he had very little contact with her.

I would try to let her know that you know I'm still Shaun, I'm still Shaun, I'm still her son. I will always be her son, always love her, always be there for her and me being a Muslim isn't going to change that, in fact it's going to make that more of a necessity. And now we wouldn't even think, I go over there she makes sure she's got halal food you know she makes sure she puts the lota (vessel for washing) over the toilet for me you know it's, but make sure that the dog hasn't— because she's got a dog— hasn't been in the room where I'm going to sleep. Because I've never made it a burden for her you know, and you see her with my wife. I mean I just sit down and watch them sometimes. I'm just amazed how you know, they just get on. My wife and her they just clicked, I think if they hadn't have met me then they still would have been friends you know, I think Allah would have bought them together somehow...

After prison, Ali also reconnected his father and the Irish kinship community in which he grew up. Through his interactions within his community, he re-embraced his Irish ethnicity. This was something he felt he lost during his time in his Chinese gang. He was planning a trip to Ireland with his mother to revisit the village his parents came from and where he still had family. Ali described his time in prison as that of a 'Super-Salafi'. In the early phase, after his conversion to Islam, he felt that he had used religion as a 'shield'. After release and through his interactions with his family he felt he had internalised religion where it was now one aspect of his identity along with his nationality and ethnicity.

The death of a close family member can make individuals assess the transcendental costs of their involvement in crime, for Naveed and Abdullah, the death of close family members became turning points after which they decided to move away from crime (Topalli, Brezina and Bernhardt, 2013). Abdullah had started to reflect on the precarious and transitory nature of life after the death of his father and his son. He felt that he had to change while he still had the chance. The fear that current behaviour could lead to punishment in the afterlife became a salient concern for Abdullah.

Someone said to me ‘Brother, you read namaaz (obligatory prayer)?’ I said, ‘Not yet, but I’m trying’ he says ‘Aajah, borah time ah (there’s plenty of time)!’, I say to him ‘Time nah koi pathanee (you don’t know about time)’. I had a son, at the age of three, he died. But did I ever think in my life when I was young, that I was ever gonna bury my own kid? Or was he gonna bury me? Do you understand where I’m coming from? Stuff like that, it’s called experience and the past life, the stuff you’re doing, and what you say and what happens, or what you’re talking about, how you take it, what would go on in life, I can say that all the time. Namaaz purneh resah, (I’ll do namaz later) when I get a bit old, daree nikarsee, boodeh orsah (I’ll keep a beard when I’m older), we’ll read. But I might never get that chance. So that’s why I say now going back to why we’re here, if I don’t change now, when will I change?

Abdullah, had hidden his time in prison from his children. He was afraid that his children would start seeing crime as something to aspire to and did not want them to go down that path.

They knew their father was always away at work, and he’s working away and he’s doing things. I’ve never let my son know even till today that I’ve been in prison... So I kept it discreet until they get to a certain age and then just explain to them when they understand. Do you understand what I mean? Because it might reflect on them then, thinking that it’s cool. ‘Cause people look at it as I’ve been a criminal and it’s cool. So, it’s a wrong image. I don’t wanna put that image across to them so no I haven’t, I’ve never told them, and there’s no need to. It might affect them, you see. So, I’ve kept it discreet and clean and simple. I have told them, that’s (prison) a bad place to go. So, it’s more education wise for them and keeping them on top and not make the mistakes what I made. Just to better their lives, that’s it to be honest with you.

In thinking of his childhood, Abdullah felt that his parents did not have too much time to spend with him as they had too many financial responsibilities to an extended family in Pakistan. In this he felt his situation was different from his father’s, he was more involved in the care of his children and did not have responsibilities to an extended family in Pakistan. Along with this, he felt his father had given him a connection to a community and was a role model for him and wanted his children to think of him in a similar way. He had changed his

group of friends and involved himself in the mosque so that his children would see him a religious person rather than a drug dealer.

Speaking to Baba, speaking to Ajmal Shah, speaking to other people who are members, you know holy people around. Interacting with them. It's just a change because I didn't have that in me before and now I do. Before I wasn't willin' to because of my attitude and what I was doing. I was ashamed of what I was doing. So, I've changed, I don't have nothin' to hide, nothin' to be ashamed about. What I've done I've done, I've moved on. Do you understand where I'm comin' from? So now my attitude is changed, I've moved away and now I'm more open, that's it. Before I wasn't, so it makes me out to feel like now I should start interacting with them because of my kids, when I go out I want to take my kids with me. So, I take my kids with me, that's what they know now 'cause that's what I want them to be. So, I think it's important for me now to interact, knowing that they know as well.

Naveed's desistance journey started in prison. He described his father's death while he was in prison as a turning point in his life. Naveed served sixteen years in prison. He was nineteen when he was convicted and thirty-five when he left prison. Upon release, he was very keen to settle down and make up for the years he lost. He met his wife through an online website and got married a few months after his release. Naveed and his wife had been through a lot of difficult times together: they had lost a child during childbirth, his mother had turned them both out of the house at one point because Naveed was unemployed, and his wife's father had suffered a brain tumour. However, they had weathered these difficulties together. At the time of the interview, Naveed had a sixteen-month-old son. He was living independently with his wife. Their house was close to both his mother and his parents-in-law's house. Naveed and his wife were both working full-time.

Even participants who were still involved in crime saw their role as a parent as an important motivator for changing their involvement in crime in the future. Dawood had recently been arrested and charged with being involved in the supply of drugs and possession of a firearm. This time he was dreading his expected prison sentence as he was established in his role working on a farm full-time and his role as a father for his two children.

So now I'm just waiting for the sentencing... so I just have to wait and see now. They've done my reports, I've got loads of character references and all of that kind of stuff together so just have to wait and see, like I said d'you know my life has never been better than at the moment, I'm back working all the time at the farms, just done all the lambing d'you know all the sheep and stuff like that, were gonna worm them next week as well. I was working late yesterday as well, that's why I didn't get up till late today erm yeah and like my mum's got horses and that as well, I wanna get a horse for myself as well now, but like I said full time work, life's brilliant. Before I probably would have not have been bothered going to jail but now I am.

Dawood was also worried about the impact of his arrest and imprisonment on his children. As a young offender, he had found prison exciting and fun; now that he was older with responsibilities, he was dreading the sentence.

To be honest I loved it, I did. God forbid me but I did, it was brilliant. Just a load of other lads that there are like minded, you know that have the karate to meet people from different places. Like I said sometimes we'd be in the cell we'd be playing on the play station with this joint in our mouth and you'd have to look at the bars on the window to remember where you was. It's not really a deterrent n'all to be honest. Now obviously I'm all set because my kids they're eight, nine and I don't want them d'you know, obviously not to see me. Because I have custody of them with my mum. So, I'm there every day. I'm doing everything everyday with them. I did a sentence in 2008 but it was only six months and they was only small then do you know what I mean? So they didn't really know then, but now obviously they know, they know what's going on. My son is saying, 'Dad I hate the police I hate the police.' I'm saying 'Why, why hate the police? It's my fault, why if I go to prison it's only because of the actions that I've done. Why hate the police they're only doing their job at the end of the day.' If you don't put yourself in them situations then you don't need to be away. In what comes to you, kind of thing.

Similarly, Immad, who had served several sentences for drug dealing and violent assaults, wanted to move away from involvement in crime because of his family. Despite his constant focus on 'calming' down and changing, he was still struggling to control his anger.

Yeah it would be because my parents are old now, they get stressed out, they get proper stressed out and but sometimes it happens and I think 'What have I done now!', mum's gonna get stressed out or dad's gonna get stressed out, wife's gonna get stressed out, baby – she'll be looking for daddy, just little things like that and then I think, but I'd say, 'never say never'.

As Immad's daughter was growing older (she was sixteen months old at the last interview), he was beginning to realise that he could not keep being involved in crime without her being impacted by it. He wanted her to see him as a positive role model.

I think as soon as she, because we're gonna start doing, every Thursday my father does an erm dua (prayer) at home, so I think this Thursday I'ma start doing it from now on, because I got a baby girl, I want her to, to know what daddy's doing – daddy's gonna try being good.

Immad was living quite close to his parents and siblings.

Yeah, next street (to his parent's house). My mum won't let me out of (name of town) because she wants me, like if it was up to my mum I think I'd still be living at home. She won't let me go nowhere, I gotta stay within eyesight of me mum yeah.

Immad's wife worked full-time while he spent his day looking after their daughter. His family, who all lived nearby, helped him with this.

I babysit the baby yeah I look after her. I change the nappy, well just when she's had a wee but when she's had a poo I don't change her. I just wait for me mum or something but past week or so I've stopped changing her now because she's only used to her grandma and her mum changing her 'cause my mum's been going mad at me saying 'Why you changing her nappy?' I say 'Well no one's there and I'm not guna bring her out every minute to bring her to yours to change her nappy.' So I said 'I might as well change it' but if she's had a poo I'll call my sister-in-law then.

This focus on close involvement in the care of children, represents a change in the social role of father for second and third generation immigrants. Most had spoken of their fathers as

distant, cold or absent in their lives during their childhood, they attached a lot of importance to their own role in their children's lives.

For younger offenders, relationships with their parents were their most important family relationships post-release. For some, these relationships were important in making them want to make changes to their identity and lifestyle. For other participants, the unsettled nature of their childhood relationship with their parents remained the same and they looked for a stable mentoring figure in other relationships. Waqar attributed his decision to desist to his parents. He wanted to have a 'clean' income so that he could share it with his parents. At the time of the interview, Waqar had been out of prison for six months. His anger was in control and he was sure he would not go back to committing crimes.

Because I can't give the money to my mum. That's why whatever I do. I could make millions, but it's not me, you know? I can't even do nothing, I can't go, I want to do something family, I couldn't do it. It's always just money that I'll spend for buying dumb stuff. There's no— you can save it, but you're just going to spend it, because it's just restricted with some of the stuff you can do with it, because they know it's not clean. So, I can't take my mum on holiday, my liberty like that. If I do, I'll be scared like everything, something will have to, something might, because it's not, it's not good.

Waqar's parents were a source of support for him throughout his time in prison. They came to visit him each month throughout his prison stay.

But me, I regret all of that. Because I couldn't learn. I reckon if I listened to what my parents kept telling me to do—because they supported me throughout, I can never blame them. I was raised good, like I never needed to worry, my family always supported me, if I wanted something, they would get it for me. And they always like treated me properly. I can never say, ever, blame them for my own thing, because even when I went to jail, I wasn't speaking to them, I went to jail, they were coming to see me all the time. All the time, coming to, like other people were sending me stuff and doing stuff like that, but them, no matter if I said no to them, they would just [be] there every month sending me something, every month regardless. It's like, I can't blame them.

Waqar has a close relationship with his sister who is eighteen. He regards her as his best friend. He is also close to his parents. Waqar's younger siblings are much younger than him and don't know about his time in prison; since Waqar has been away from home a lot, they are not very close to him. This sense of disruption to close relationships because of imprisonment is a common theme in the research.

Just... like it used to be good, but seeing how I'm always away from home, it's like whenever I do come in the house, not like, like that relationship where I sort of that I'm closest with my little, she's like 18. I'm very close with her, because she'd tell me, like she's basically one of my best friends. So I'm very close with her. And others, they're like this that, we still talk, joke around and laugh, but because I'm never there, they hardly see me. My sister, because she's older, she knows where I'm—the young ones, they're not really. I think they do know I'm in prison but they just try not to ask me, scared to ask me.

For some of the participants an older sibling became a strong mentoring figure that prompted the desire to move away from crime. This was the case for Mohamad, Vin and Hameed, who had older brothers who had previously been involved in crime but had managed to desist successfully. All three looked up to these older siblings as role-models they could follow to move away from crime.

Hameed, mixed race, saw his older half-brother as an important guide in moving away from crime. His brother was also an ex-offender. Hameed felt his experience of moving away from crime made him a suitable role model.

Cuz my brother, my older brother, he's done the job before as well. So, he came, when he came up (out of prison), he was in a straight, he was like doing this he's a professional boxer now. So, like, but I mean he basically, when I came out he was sort of trying to keep me around sort of thing. Training and stuff like that. And yeah, I'm just basically trying to follow his footsteps but take my own path sort of thing. Yeah, so he's trying to keep me off the roads and stuff, cuz he was basically the road life as well. But we got two, we've got different dads as well. He came from Jamaica. So yeah, he has his own struggles with stuff. But now he's doing something good with his life and like, he's schooling me and stuff like that. So yeah, take his advice.

Imprisonment and conviction can lead to ruptures in personal relationships. These can continue after release as well. Ahmed (British Bangladeshi, convicted as a sex-offender) found life after prison much harder than his time inside. Being outside prison was particularly hard for him as he was not allowed to meet his younger daughters unsupervised. He was also not able to move back to his house after release.

Ahmed had attributed his crime to the strict control his parents had exercised on his life. In particular, he resented the way he was forced into an early marriage. His resentment against his parents extended to his wife, and he held her partially responsible for ‘pushing’ him into his grooming and exploitation of girls under the legal age of consent. Ahmed’s relationship with his wife was still strained. She had tried to support him through his time in prison by hiding his crimes from his children and extended family. After his release, she had put together funding to help him start a course to train as a personal trainer. However, she was still unsure about whether she could trust him and remained worried about him cheating on her again. Ahmed was also ambivalent about whether his relationship would survive.

Zulfikar had moved away from Nottingham, where his family lived, as he did not want his family to be impacted by his involvement in crime. He kept in touch with his family via telephone but did not want to move back to Nottingham.

Strong connections within the family were an important motivator for change in participants. Having relationships of trust and responsibility could become ‘hooks’ for change. Family relationships could also provide positive role-models and support in transitioning to a crime-free identity.

Conclusion

I started the chapter by discussing the role of religious communities in supporting desistance from crime. For ex-offenders, participation within a religious community led to changes in social relationships, along with tangible and intangible help to settle back into life outside. Religious communities provided social capital to maintain a crime free identity. Along with socioeconomic integration, civic engagement provided another avenue through which participants could occupy social roles that were linked to positive identity changes and a

move away from crime. In this, the role of ‘wounded healer’ was particularly valuable in helping participants manage stigma and develop a new positive self-identity. Spiritual sense-making and community ties may be aspects of re-entry that are specific to participants who have an affiliation to a religion, however the support provided by the religious community was not different to what are established social factors that support desistance from crime, such as: positive social bonds and relationships of mutual reciprocity; support in finding long term employment and housing; and opportunities for civic engagement.

The importance of self-narratives in influencing long term desistance from crime is reinforced through the life stories presented in this chapter as participants who did not have strong redemption narratives could be part of religious communities but could continue to remain involved in crime. For persistent offenders, aspirations of moving back to a pure crime free identity was part of their self-understanding, these participants however saw themselves as lacking the power or motivation to deal with challenges and set-backs. They regarded these external pressures as too powerful and saw their actions as being driven by these external drives. Religious ideas of fate and weakness in the face of worldly temptations as well as ideas of endless opportunities to gain forgiveness were commonly used techniques of neutralisation.

The life-story accounts suggest that social roles in the family were the strongest ‘hooks’ for motivating changes in identity and in promoting desistance from crime. Developing positive social roles as a father, husband, son or brother were central to decisions to desist from crime. This chapter concludes the empirical findings of this research. In the next chapter I summarise the research findings and outline directions for further research.

8: Discussion and conclusions

This research focused on the experiences of Muslim offenders who have been in English prisons and aimed to fill gaps in knowledge about the influence of religion on this growing sub-group within the prison population. In this chapter I start by summarising the research findings. The first section brings together insights from Chapters Four and Five to discuss the relevance of religion from early childhood up to adolescence and early adulthood (RQ1). I then summarise the significance of religion in the prison context (RQ2) and finally, I look at the importance of religion in life after prison (RQ3). I outline three ways in which religion influences identity throughout the life stories collected. Building from these insights, I discuss avenues for further research.

8.1. Use and meaning of religion at each stage of the life course

Across the life course and in all the different contexts participants inhabit, religion is used in three main ways. First, it is a source of collective identity through which participants who share religious beliefs form small local religious communities. This community belonging leads to the formation of strong interpersonal relationships that are similar to kinship ties, which become the basis of shared responsibilities and a sense of belonging. Within these kinship groups, tangible and intangible resources are shared amongst group members. Although Muslim identity has received attention as a form of a pan-Islamic identity, my research suggests that its significance for my research participants lay in providing a sense of rootedness to a local community.

Second, religious teachings become the basis through which participants develop a moral self-identity. Religious communities become the site through which moral and cultural learning take place. Participants learn rules of good and bad behaviour and develop idealistic aspirational social roles. These moral teachings and aspirational roles influence their social interactions in all aspects of their lives, not just their relationships, within their religious community. My research focuses on the agentic ways in which individuals engage with moral codes to develop an internal and external self. This engagement is central to developing positive personhood within given power relations. For participants personal

meaning was sought through a developing focus on achieving continuous personal development and ideas of the 'pious self'.

Third, spiritual sense-making is a significant part of religious teachings and ritual. This spiritualism is an important resource which is used by participants to make sense of all aspects of their lives and is therefore an important part of self-identity. It allows participants to disconnect from the material realities of their day to day existence and see their lives as having a higher meaning or significance. This spiritual sense making highlights the important role of the transcendental in engaging with transactional aspects of everyday life. The role of religious sensemaking and ritual as a means of disengaging from material realities is important. It makes individuals resilient in coping with setbacks and adopting a positive attitude towards distressing life events. However, in some instances it can lead to a passive outlook in which life happens outside the control of the individual.

The research question was sub-divided to look at religious identity before prison, in prison and after release. I discuss the main research findings with regard to each life stage next.

8.11. Before prison experiences

This research was interested in understanding the influence of religion on Muslim offenders, starting with their time before prison. In early childhood, religion was seen as a connection to kinship community. Through participation within this community, respondents learnt religious ritual and teaching as well as cultural values and practises related to their ethnic group. Spiritual sense-making was also important for some participants from a young age. They used this sense-making to give meaning to life experiences.

With regard to Muslim offenders' involvement in crime, what emerged as significant was the commonality of experiences between this sub-group and what are already established characteristics of the offender population. Drivers towards crime remain well established and include socio-economic deprivations, racism, experiences of poverty, weak social bonds in the family and at school, the pull of negative peer relationships, substance abuse, and a lack of opportunity to establish a viable career or trade.

The social, political and economic context of this study highlights the importance of already known aspects of urban youth formation, in which boredom, poverty and de-industrialisation have shrunk the space for working class youth to transition successfully to adulthood (Alexander, 2000; Fraser, 2015). Connection to a neighbourhood and territorial affiliations give agency to marginalised groups, allowing them a sense of location and belonging in a society from which they feel socially excluded. Involvement in crime allows marginalised youth leadership roles, close social bonds, excitement, thrill and access to a lifestyle they could not otherwise afford. Involvement in crime was seen as a response to a lack of opportunity and social capital. The roots for criminal involvement lay in their experiences as second or third generation immigrants, navigating childhood in their neighbourhood and schools in England. Authoritarian parenting style was perhaps the only risk factor which can be linked to cultural parenting practises within South Asian families. However, changes in parenting styles of respondents in dealing with their own children suggest these cultural differences may become less significant for future generations.

For born-Muslims, close family ties remained important even while they were involved in crime. To reconcile the values between their community, family and peer groups, participants adopted many complex strategies. Seeing their involvement in crime as being driven by ‘fate’, or the pull of ‘worldly temptations’, allowed respondents to maintain attachment to norms and values while also transgressing these norms. Hiding their crime or blocking themselves from the moral implications of their actions, were other important strategies employed as a show of respect for community norms while being involved in crime. Involvement in crime was mitigated by these strategies as respondents took great effort to avoid stigma within the community. These connections within the community also played an important role in helping respondents manage their time in prison along with their re-entry into society after release.

8.12. Experiences in prison

During imprisonment, an increased focus on religious ritual and learning was common in the sample. Religion helped in managing the ‘pains’ of imprisonment. Spiritual sense-making played an important role in helping respondents attach positive meaning to their imprisonment. Time in prison was a way of absolving sins as well as a chance to focus on

spiritual development and self-improvement. Religion provided a 'second chance' and a 'blue print' for a new identity inside prison. The Muslim community inside prison was multi-ethnic and plural, with many internal differences. Shared religion was not the basis of forming relationships inside prisons. Respondents attached more importance to neighbourhood affiliations in creating ties in prison.

Solidarity amongst Muslim prisoners emerged in a context where they felt stereotyped and marginalised. For some converts in particular, suspicion and scrutiny of their conversion was an uncomfortable and alienating experience. In some prisons, the relationships between Muslim and non-Muslim prisoners and between Muslim prisoners and staff were strained. In these prisons, there tended to be more solidarity amongst the Muslim prisoners to deal with what they perceived to be a hostile environment. When respondents moved out of such prisons, they were likely to form better relationships with other non-Muslim prisoners as well as better relationships with staff. Relationships with prison officers were better in prisons close to the respondent's home outside. Participants respected officers who were authoritative, fair and treated them as a 'person.'

8.13. Religion after prison

After release from prison, spiritual sense-making was still important in giving meaning to difficult experiences. This also gave participants hope for the future. Religious communities were useful in providing tangible and intangible support to help with resettlement. Religious teachings were used to develop ideals of aspirational social roles. Religious practise became more important for older offenders as they focused more on generative concerns. In this, being a pious, practising Muslim was seen as important in order to transmit religious teachings to the younger generation and to inspire them to lead a positive pro-social life. Interaction and acceptance from religious leaders, community members or pilgrimages could act as rituals of redemption and helped confirm the participants' new positive identity.

After release, the religious community as well as the family played an important role in helping respondents build pro-social bonds as well as to access help with housing and employment. For respondents who had the motivation to move away from crime, this support was useful in helping them desist. After release, respondents attached importance to fulfilling different social roles within the family and community. Involvement in the family and

helping in the care of family members was a source of positive achievement. The role of ‘wounded healer’ helped in consolidating the new crime-free identity. Using their story to help others gave their negative life experiences positive value. For participants, success was defined through having stability in employment, housing and social relationships. The ‘pulls’ towards crime remained strong for participants. They focused on rewards in the after-life to overcome daily difficulties and deprivations faced through giving up crime.

| Influences on identity at different stages of the life course | | |
|--|---|---|
| Age phase | Role of religion | Non-religious influences |
| Childhood | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Fictive kinship community (ii) Learning social rules and religious ritual (iii) Spiritual sense-making | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Family: Parenting style, disruption to family through divorce, experiences of abuse or death of a family member. (ii) School: Exclusion, bullying and racism. (iii) Neighbourhood: a place of liminality, friendship, freedom and opportunity, also a space of violence, racism and involvement in crime. |
| Adolescence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Decreased importance of religious community and family relationships (ii) No practise of religious ritual. (iii) Limited adherence to religious social rules. (iv) Acknowledgement of the shift away from religion signified through the hiding of crimes and blocking the implications of involvement in crime. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Lack of access to rewarding occupational roles (ii) Increased importance of peer relationships and neighbourhood affiliations (iii) Increased importance of consumer goods and a leisure lifestyle. (iv) Continued emotional distress due to |

| | | |
|--------------|---|--|
| | (v) Spiritual sense-making used to see crime as caused by external influences. | childhood experiences. |
| Prison | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Increased importance of religious ritual. (ii) Focus on aspirational social roles in family outside prison. (iii) Spiritual sense-making used to give meaning to the 'pains' and ontological insecurity of prison. (iv) Plural religious community (v) Negative stereotyping based on religion in some prisons. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Neighbourhood contacts remained important. (ii) Status in prison linked to 'fronting' and crime committed. (iii) Wanting to 'do your own time'. (iv) Prison environment influenced relationships with other prisoners as well as staff. |
| After prison | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Spiritual sense-making remains important in giving meaning to experiences. (ii) Increased importance of religious rules and obligations linked to social roles in family. (iii) Importance of religious community as fictive kin. (iv) Shift in focus from acquiring things to wanting to 'give back to the community.' (v) For persistent offenders religious ideas were used to explain crime as driven by external temptations. This helped them maintain a core pure religious identity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Continued importance of neighbourhood affiliation (ii) Continued reliance on drugs and alcohol. (iii) Crime remains a viable option for making money. (iv) Managing the stigma of conviction. (v) Positive relationships with probation staff. |

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| | they could come back to in the future. | |
|--|---|--|

8.2. Implications for future research

The focus research on individual pathology or deviance obscures the structural differentials and inequality that create sub-groups of marginalised populations who are at the receiving end of crime control and sanction. This research collected micro level details about the life experiences of one such marginalised group, which is over represented within the prison population, and shares strong similarities between the experiences of these respondents and previous research which has looked at involvement in crime, imprisonment and life after release. This suggests that rather than looking for insight through a focus on ‘cultures of crime’ within religious communities, experiences of marginalisation and deprivation common to working class communities would be a better focus of future research attention.

Along with this, for working class, ethnic minority communities, the deprivations may be exacerbated through experiences of racism which may marginalise them from mainstream society. The research included mostly second-generation migrants who were born in England and grew up here. Their connection to their neighbourhood and their sense of belonging was forged through peer-relationships in their neighbourhood; their education experiences are in schools in England. Their experiences of marginalisation and alienation from a young age raise important questions about social cohesion and attitudes towards migrants that can lead to increased marginality and the shrinking of opportunity across generations.

At the heart of the life stories are the processes of racialisation that are at work through all stages of the life course. Starting from experiences of negative stereotyping in schools, the neighbourhood, through early interactions with the police, to their marginalisation from the labour market and experiences within the criminal justice system, respondents outline day to day experiences which led to their increased marginalisation from society. Understanding the influence of race and religion on differential treatment in different social institutions remains an important research imperative.

Life stories of offenders highlight the importance of the religious community at different stages in the life course. Research adopting an ethnographic approach would allow deeper

immersion in the community and a more detailed discussion of intergenerational relationships within the community. More nuanced understanding of the role that these relationships play in socialisation and identity development would add to what has emerged as significant within this research.

The local neighbourhood was another social context that remained significant at every stage in the life story. However, the important role of neighbourhood affiliations for youth socialisation and their transition to adulthood requires more in-depth small-scale research. More ethnographic research on youth affiliations in different neighbourhoods would be important in developing a deeper understanding of local specificities as well as global trends that influence the choices of youth within these contexts.

This research has collected information on Muslim offenders through multiple interviews over a relatively short period of time. More longitudinal research, which employs both qualitative interviews as well as quantitative data, could follow a larger cohort of Muslim offenders at more graded intervals. Following a larger sample through their life course would add more detail on the role of religion and the experiences of offenders. This would allow for a better understanding of specific factors that influence pathways into offending and journeys away from crime.

The importance of family in supporting respondents through incarceration and in their desistance comes through quite strongly in the life stories. Research that involves interviews of respondents as well as their close family members would allow for oral life histories of offenders from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. Such an approach would allow for triangulation of research findings and give multiple perspectives on critical events and their impact within a family unit. For example, the experience of divorce or school exclusion as remembered from the perspective of different family members would provide more context and detail on these critical events and how these influence different individuals, their interactions, and the family unit as a whole.

This research started by outlining civilizational ‘clash’ and concerns around religious practise in secular society. The data generated does add to these debates, yet these concerns were peripheral to participants’ concerns for self-actualisation, local belonging and personal relationships. The commonality of experience between Muslim offenders and previous research on ethnic minority groups, as well as their involvement in crime and deviance, their

time in prison, and their experience of desistance, suggest that religious practise, while being an important influence, is not the sole signifier of identity for Muslim offenders.

Appendix A

Third sector organisations and probation offices contacted for this research.

| |
|--|
| Switch Back |
| Foundation4life |
| Working Chance |
| Apex Trust |
| New Bridge Foundation |
| Prison Advise |
| Unlock |
| Active Change Foundation |
| My Community UK |
| Muslim Youth Helpline |
| NACRO |
| Noor Initiative |
| Mosaic |
| Date Palm Project |
| Mosque in Nelson |
| Mosque in Bury |
| Tottenham Probation Trust |
| Hackney Probation Trust |
| Tower Hamlets Probation Trust |
| Redbridge and Waltham Forest Probation Trust |
| Ilford Probation Trust |
| Barnet and Enfield Probation Trust |
| Hounslow Probation Trust |
| Brent Probation Trust |
| Croydon Probation Trust |
| Lewisham Probation Trust |
| Southwark Probation Trust |

Appendix B

| Participant's Pseudonym | Ethnicity | Convert or born Muslim | Age | No of Interviews | Duration hr: min | Recruited through | Types of crime committed |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| Ammar | Black Caribbean | Convert | 43 | 3 | 1:59 1:01 2:48 | RO | House burglaries, drug taking, assault, armed robbery |
| Abdullah | British Pakistani (Kashmir) | Born Muslim | 36 | 3 | 1:43 1:53 1:10 | Mosque | Drug dealing |
| Ali | Irish | Convert | 44 | 2 | 2:02 3:02 | Snow-balling | Burglary Attempted murder |
| Immad | British Pakistani (Kashmir) | Born Muslim | 37 | 3 | 1:15 0:44 1:15 | Mosque | Assault, cloning credit cards, drug dealing |
| Mohammad | British Pakistani | Born Muslim | 33 | 2 | 0:58 1:31 | LPT | Use of imitation firearm, robbery, money laundering, drug dealing |
| Ahmed | British Bangladeshi | Born Muslim | 45 | 2 | 1:11 1:19 | LPT | Sexual offence: sexual relationship with a child |
| Zulfikar | British Pakistani | Born Muslim | 33 | 2 | 0:44 1:02 | LPT | Burglary, drug dealing, |

| | | | | | | | |
|--------|--|----------------|----|---|--------------|--------|---|
| | | | | | | | car theft, assault |
| Imran | British Pakistani (Kashmir) | Born Muslim | 30 | 2 | 0:37 0:49 | Mosque | Assault, intimidati ng a witness |
| Dawood | White: French Roma | Convert | 31 | 1 | 1:08 | Mosque | Assault, damage to property, drug dealing, imitation firearm. |
| Rahim | British Pakistani (Kashmir) | Born Muslim | 34 | 2 | 1:33 1:54 | Mosque | Fraud |
| Ilyas | British Pakistani | Born Muslim | 37 | 1 | 0:34 | Mosque | Armed robbery |
| Yousef | Irish | Convert | 51 | 2 | 1:04 2:03 | Mosque | IRA involvem ent |
| Vin | Mixed race: Dad Caribbean Mum: half Jamaican half Indian | Convert | 21 | 1 | 1:02 | RO | Drug dealing, burglary |
| Steve | Mixed race: Dad: Monteneg ro, Mum: Guyana. | Convert | 23 | 1 | 1:00 | RO | Drug dealing |
| Hameed | Mixed race: Dad: Ugandan Mum Jamaican | Born Muslim | 21 | 1 | 1:00 | RO | Drug dealing |
| Waqar | British Somali | Born Muslim | 19 | 1 | 0:52 | RO | Drug dealing |
| Naveed | British Pakistani | Born Muslim | 40 | 1 | 1:00 | RO | Murder |

| | | | | | | | |
|---------------|--|-------------|-----------|---|------|--------|--------------------------------|
| Bilal | Mixed race: Dad: Egyptian, Mum: half Lebanese half white British | Born Muslim | Early 20s | 1 | 0:27 | RO | |
| Hamza | Mixed race: Lebanese South African | Convert | 20 | 1 | 0:17 | RO | |
| Haroon | British Kenyan | Born Muslim | 20 | 1 | 0:18 | RO | |
| Usman | British Pakistani | Born Muslim | 56 | 2 | | Mosque | Interview in Urdu not included |

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